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P R E F A C E

My hope is that this volume will cast light on certain aspects of Second Temple Judaism that have not had the attention they deserve.

I am indebted to my friends Lorenzo DiTommaso and David Satran, both of whom have encouraged me to continue this labor, even when I despaired of it, and to bring it to whatever conclusion I can. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Vered Hillel read the whole book and made many helpful remarks. I am very conscious of its imperfections and lacunae, but hope that, despite them, it will contribute to enlarging our view of this segment of antiquity.

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Jerusalem 2015

A B B R E V I A T I O N S

<i>AJ</i>	Antiquities of the Jews
<i>AJEC</i>	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity [Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums]
<i>AJS</i>	Association of Jewish Studies
<i>BETL</i>	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>BJ</i>	The Jewish War [Bellum Iudaicum]
<i>BZNW</i>	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBQ</i>	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
<i>CCSA</i>	Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum
<i>DSD</i>	Dead Sea Discoveries
<i>Geog.</i>	Geographia
<i>Hist. Eccl.</i>	Historia Ecclesiastica
<i>HSS</i>	Harvard Semitic Studies
<i>HTR</i>	Harvard Theological Review
<i>HUCA</i>	Hebrew Union College Annual
<i>IEJ</i>	Israel Exploration Journal
<i>IJS</i>	IJS Studies in Judaica
<i>JBL</i>	Journal of Biblical Literature
<i>JJS</i>	Journal of Jewish Studies
<i>JNES</i>	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
<i>JOCC</i>	Journal of Cognition and Culture
<i>JQR</i>	Jewish Quarterly Review
<i>JSJ</i>	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods
<i>JSJSup</i>	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series

JSP	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
<i>JSQ</i>	Jewish Studies Quarterly
<i>JTS</i>	Journal of Theological Studies
KTVU	Kleine Texte für Vorlesung und Übungen
<i>LAB</i>	Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum
<i>Nat. Hist.</i>	Naturalis Historia
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>OED</i>	Oxford English Dictionary
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OTP</i>	Old Testament Pseudepigrapha
OUP	Oxford University Press
<i>PAAJR</i>	Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research
<i>PGM</i>	Papyri Graecae Magicae
PS	Pseudepigrapha Series
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece
<i>RB</i>	Revue Biblique
<i>RRJ</i>	Review of Rabbinic Judaism
<i>RQ</i>	Revue de Qumran
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLEJL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Jewish Literature
SBLTT	Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
<i>SPA</i>	Studia Philonica Annual
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
SUNY	State University of New York
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha
TAZNZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum Neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZPE</i>	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik

SECRET GROUPS IN
ANCIENT JUDAISM

CHAPTER I

SECRET SOCIETIES IN ANCIENT JUDAISM

Judaism at the time of the Second Temple has been studied from various perspectives, including those of philology, sociology, history, and history of religions. In the course of these studies, considerable attention has focused on certain religious streams and groupings in Jewish society that the present study shows to be secret societies. Yet the function of religious groups in Ancient Judaism as secret societies has received scant attention. I propose that consideration of the role of secret societies in the Second Temple period of Jewish society can further contribute to our understanding of Ancient Judaism. This study concentrates on groups in ancient Jewish society that limited their membership and inducted new adherents into secret teachings and/or practices through a gradual initiation process, groups that were, in short, secret societies.

In seeking to describe and understand an ancient social group whose teachings and practice were secret, we depend on three different types of evidence. First, there are descriptions of the group found in sources external to it. These I have called “outsider” sources. They reveal how the group appeared to nonmembers, and naturally are colored by the purpose and nature of the work in which they appear, by the conceptual or ideological preferences of that work’s author and sometimes of its tradents, and so forth. Such features, of course, must be factored into any assessment of outsider sources. A second type of source consists of descriptions, laws, documents, rules, prayers, and the like, written by members of the secret group, which I have dubbed “insider sources.”¹

1. Yuval Harari (2011b), “Jewish Magic: Delineation and Remarks,” *Il Presente* 5: 13*–85* (in Hebrew). On pp. 15*–17* he discusses the “outsider”–“insider” distinction in evidence for Jewish magic.

The use of these sources must take account of the natural tendentiousness of people who considered themselves privy to special knowledge not available to other members of society.² A third source is archaeological remains, such as buildings, inscriptions, and other material evidence left by the group under discussion. These too are considered insider sources. This distinction between outsider and insider governs my use of sources.

The quite extensive outsider information suffices to make the Essenes the most important secret Jewish group for the argument that I wish to forward. They are described in some detail in the writings of Josephus and Philo and in briefer compass in various other contemporary and later works, particularly in Greek and Latin. Uniquely, the Dead Sea Scrolls also preserved ample insider sources about one variety of Essenes, which is how I regard³ the Qumran group.⁴ The Scrolls' discovery has immeasurably enhanced our knowledge of the literature, society, and thought of the last two centuries BCE and the first

2. Most modern discussion takes Georg Simmel (1906), "The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies," *American Journal of Sociology*, 11(4): 441-498, as its starting place. Lawrence E. Hazelrigg in particular, discusses Georg Simmel's formulation that, "the separation and isolation of the members of an organization from the surrounding world tends to impart an honorific or elitist sense of 'special significance'": see Lawrence E. Hazelrigg (1969), "A Reexamination of Simmel's 'The Secret and the Secret Society': Nine Propositions," *Social Forces*, 47(3): 323-330. The quotation is from p. 328. Simmel's and Hazelrigg's works are subsequently discussed. See also Hugh Urban's discussion of the "capital" gained by possession of secret knowledge and the power it confers: Hugh B. Urban (1998), "The Torment of Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in the Study of Esoteric Traditions," *History of Religions*, 37: 209-248, especially 219-221.

3. See §4.3 where I set forth my reasons for accepting this identification and refer to the extensive scholarly discussion of this question. Consult the clear discussion of identification of the Qumran group together with a balanced evaluation of the evidence both of the Greek and Latin sources and of the Qumran scrolls in John J. Collins (2010), *Beyond the Qumran Community: The Sectarian Movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans), 122-165. On the whole, I follow his views on the question of the Qumran sect's identity.

4. In note 12 in this chapter, the meaning of "sect" is discussed as applicable in the Second Temple period.

century CE.⁵ Specifically, through the Dead Sea Scrolls we know more about the Qumran covenanters than about any other Jewish group of that age. No insider sources relating to other groups survived, and the Therapeutae, for example, are known only from Philo, an outsider source. Having insider information in the case of the Qumran group helps us to overcome one of the main obstacles to the study of secret societies, which is that they are secret. Because we know of the Qumran covenanters in such detail, they play a prominent role in the discussion in the body of this book.

Were there other secret Jewish groups in the Second Temple period? Josephus briefly describes three more “philosophies” in addition to that of the Essenes: those of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots.⁶ These could form another starting point for our investigation, but first we need to enquire whether any of them bequeathed us “insider” writings to supplement Josephus’s brief descriptions and which would play a role comparable to that which the Qumran sectarian scrolls play for the Essenes. Such writings must be sought in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha and Jewish Hellenistic literature, as well as in traditions and textual fragments that later Jewish and Christian traditions preserved. Moreover, because far from all the Dead Sea Scrolls were composed by the covenanters of Qumran,⁷ it is possible that some writings of the other three philosophies were preserved among the

5. The Qumran manuscripts have now been published in full by Oxford University Press in a series of volumes titled *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955–2009) (40 Vols.).

6. In a list of the groups that took part in the revolt against the Romans, Josephus mentions a number of groups associated with the Zealots. These include the Sicarii [knife-wielders] and the followers of two rebel leaders, John of Giscala and Simeon bar Giora (*BJ* 7: 253–274). There is no indication that these groups had secret teachings or practices.

7. Shemaryahu Talmon strongly urged the term “covenanter” for members of the Qumran group. See Shemaryahu Talmon (1994), “The Community of the Renewed Covenant: Between Judaism and Christianity,” in E.C. Ulrich and J.C. VanderKam (eds.), *The Community of the Renewed Covenant* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 3–24.

nonsectarian works found in the Qumran caves.⁸ In addition to these sources, moreover, some information might survive elsewhere, such as in the writings of Muslim heresiologists.⁹

Theoretically, then, sources surviving in these corpora could provide us with some insider evidence stemming from the Pharisees, the Sadducees, or the Zealots to complement the outsider reports in Greek and Latin sources and early rabbinic literature. In practice, however, we cannot identify such sources because almost none of the writings surviving among the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, in the non-Essene Qumran scrolls, and among Jewish writings in Greek, can be ascribed confidently to any familiar Second Temple Jewish philosophies. Thus we cannot identify works composed by Pharisees, Sadducees, or Zealots that could play a role comparable to that which the Dead Sea Scrolls play for the Essenes. We cannot identify insider works to complement the known outsider reports.

For the study of secret societies, then, the combination of outsider and insider information as in the case of Qumran is ideal, yet it is rarely encountered, chiefly because of secrecy. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, as is subsequently demonstrated, Jews and non-Jews who knew secrets kept them faithfully and punctiliously. Consequently, secret teachings and practice were not transmitted down the centuries in Jewish and Christian traditions or in ancient Greek and Latin writings that were copied, recopied, and remained in circulation. Consequently, insider information is sparse or nonexistent. Only by archaeological discovery can we gain access to it, as was the case with the Qumran scrolls. Occasionally we can garner some bits and pieces from tendentious writings by renegade members of secret sects or from polemical tracts directed against them.¹⁰ Of course, we must bear that

8. There is no reason to assume that *all* the manuscripts preserved in the Qumran caves were authored or even copied by the covenanters. The survival there of scriptural books is adequate demonstration of that. Some of the nonscriptural texts also originated apart from the Qumran covenanters. See Chapter 4, §4.3.

9. John C. Reeves (1999), "Exploring the Afterlife of Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Medieval Near Eastern Religious Traditions: Some Initial Soundings," *JSJ* 30(2): 148–177.

10. Polemical reports, like those about the Gnostics found in the writings of the early Christian heresiologists, must be approached with caution.

tendentiousness in mind when using such sources. Thus the lack of identifiable insider sources available to us makes the project of investigating ancient Jewish secret societies particularly challenging, Qumran and the Essenes excluded.

We must bear two inherent characteristics of secret societies in mind as this project proceeds. Secret societies' need to guard their secrets brings about a typically strict limitation of membership. This is expressed by their careful, gradual initiation of new members into their secrets. First the Qumran covenanters strictly limited admission to the group and inducted new adherents into their company by gradual revelation of the group's secret teachings and practices. In tandem with this gradual revelation of secrets, initiates were admitted to ever-closer contact with the "purity of the Many," which Hempel interprets convincingly as gradual admission to the ritually pure food and then the drink of the group.¹¹ This stage-by-stage revelation of secret teachings and practices constituted a graded initiation process and is legislated by the group's regulations, particularly in the *Community Rule*.

The strictly controlled stages of initiation preceding full admission were complemented by a second factor, the hierarchical organization of the full members. There were differences among various levels of full members, and each individual's status within those levels was fixed. This fixed status determined how much of the group's secret practice and teaching was revealed to each member and also his role and conduct in the group's common activities. Only the preeminent leader and teacher of the group, called the *maskil* at Qumran, was privy to the greatest secrets. For these reasons we may characterize the Qumran Essene group as a secret society.

In this study I investigate ancient Jewish secret societies, taking the Therapeutae and particularly the Essenes as my points of departure. The categories I utilize in the course of this book differ from today's generally employed, "sectarian–normative." Instead I utilize social

11. Charlotte Hempel (2012), "Who is Making Dinner at Qumran?," *JTS* (NS) 63: 49–65.

categories, primarily secret–open or esoteric–exoteric.¹² Analogous secret societies existed in the non-Jewish world of Late Antiquity, such as the mystery cults, some of which I describe in Chapter 2. I set chronological limits for this inquiry in the last centuries of the largely pre-Hellenized ancient world,¹³ and more particularly in the last two centuries BCE and the first century CE, a time span that is designated, somewhat imprecisely, as the Second Temple period.

Having said this, I proceed in the following manner. In the next two chapters I further clarify and analyze the characteristic features of secret societies. Then I consider in some detail known secret societies in the Hellenistic–Roman world as well as Jewish secret societies in terms of the characteristics discussed in the preceding chapters. After that, I proceed in two different directions. Using the analyzed characteristics as criteria, I seek to isolate other secret groups in the Jewish society of the age, and, finally, I examine the social context of esoteric tradition.

12. Certainly the categories of heretical and orthodox are anachronistic and inappropriate. There have been sociological studies of the Qumran covenanters as a sect, drawing particularly on the work of Max Weber and Bryan R. Wilson. This endeavor has been reprised and summarized by David J. Chalcraft (2011), “Is a Historical Comparative Sociology of (Ancient Jewish) Sects Possible?” in Sacha Stern (ed.), *Sects and Sectarianism in Jewish History* (IJS Studies in Judaica, 12; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 235–286, and Paul-François Tremlett (2011), “Weber-Foucault-Nietzsche: Uncertain Legacies for the Sociology of Religion,” in idem., 287–303. See the earlier essays in David J. Chalcraft (ed.) (2007), *Sectarianism in Early Judaism: Sociological Advances* (London & Oakville, CT: Equinox). In addition, see the articles by Eyal Regev (2007), *Sectarianism at Qumran: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Religion and Society, 45; Berlin & New York: de Gruyter), 163–196, and idem. (2010), “Between Two Sects: Differentiating the *Yahad* and the Damascus Covenant,” in Charlotte Hempel (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Text and Context* (STDJ, 90; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 431–449. I do not deny that approaching Qumran as a sect is fruitful, but regarding the group from the perspective of secret societies provides an additional path to understanding.

13. Michael E. Stone (1980), *Scriptures, Sects and Visions: A Profile of Judaism from Ezra to the Jewish Revolts* (Philadelphia & Oxford: Fortress & Blackwells), 5–6, 17–18. I do not consider secrecy in ancient Judaism through the prism of Renaissance and later European esotericism, as is so often done. That matter is discussed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

“ESOTERIC,” MYSTERIES, AND SECRECY

To proceed with the investigation, it is essential to work with clear, unambiguous terminology. Therefore I devote this chapter to setting forth the way I understand a number of terms used by scholars in discussing secret groups. Unfortunately, quite a lot of current terminology is unclear or polyvalent. This is particularly the case with the adjective “esoteric” and the noun “esotericism,” which have long and complex histories.¹ My own approach to these adjectives differs from that of many contemporary scholars, whose focus is on “Western Esotericism.” That designation invokes a particular spectrum of movements of thought and of organizations that developed from the Renaissance down to modern times.² Although clear lines of descent can be drawn between certain ancient esoteric movements or ideas and Western Esotericism, to use Western Esotericism as a lens for focusing the study of Late Antique evidence inevitably distorts one’s perception of the ancient situation.

1. Wouter Hanegraaff presents the terms “esoteric” and “exoteric” in detail in his article “Esotericism,” in Wouter Hanegraaff et al. (eds.) (2006b), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden & Boston: Brill), 336–340. A recent, helpful discussion of the terminology and the danger of its reification is Christian H. Bull (2015), “Ancient Hermeticism and Esotericism,” *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*, 15: 109–135, particularly 126–129. He draws on works by Jonathan Z. Smith, Hugh Urban, and Jan Assmann.

2. A short introduction to Western Esotericism may be found in Antoine Faivre (1998), “Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism,” in R. van den Broek and Wouter Hanegraaff (eds.), *Gnosis and Hermeticism From Antiquity to Modern Times* (SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions; Albany, NY: SUNY), 109–124, and it is discussed and documented in more detail in §2.1.

I therefore first present my understanding of esoteric and then discuss the way the words esoteric and esotericism are used in the current study of Western Esotericism. Through this comparison I show why using them with present-day reference is problematic when we wish study to Jewish secret groups in the Second Temple period.³

2.1 ESOTERIC

I employ the adjective esoteric to refer to (1) written or oral teaching, knowledge, and practice that are available only to a strictly delimited group in society, or (2) a social group in which such secret knowledge or practice is inculcated and cultivated.⁴ As mentioned earlier, the hidden knowledge or practice is often uncovered or taught in stages to a person seeking to adhere to the said group.⁵ It follows, therefore, that such knowledge or, equally, such a group may be called esoteric, “hidden,”

3. This seems to me far preferable to simply avoiding the terms altogether, which will just create a potential cause of confusion in subsequent discussion.

4. This accords with the online OED definition, “Of philosophical doctrines, treatises, modes of speech, etc.: Designed for, or appropriate to, an inner circle of advanced or privileged disciples; communicated to, or intelligible by, the initiated exclusively. Hence of disciples: Belonging to the inner circle, admitted to the esoteric teaching.” This OED definition does not mention practice, yet we consider that esoteric can also be applied properly to particular practice emerging from or related to the esoteric teachings. Dylan M. Burns (2014), “Ancient Esoteric Traditions: Mystery, Revelation, Gnosis,” in Christopher Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World* (London: Routledge), 17–33 and particularly p. 29, argues that “esotericism” is a term relevant both in Late Antiquity and in tracing the “reception-history” of certain streams of Late Antique thought from the Renaissance on. This understanding, though expressed more clearly than some of the views analyzed and discussed in the current work, still casts its net too narrowly, I fear.

5. Leo Strauss (1941), “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” *Social Research*, 8: 488–504, suggests that, particularly in periods of persecution, philosophers and other thinkers expressed their esoteric teaching, which was in conflict with socially and politically imposed views, by presenting it “between the lines,” i.e., by using literary techniques in their writings that would signal pregnant passages only to the thoughtful. This may be true, but involves a somewhat different view of inner learning and secrecy, revealing the “true” meaning only to those gifted enough

or “secret.” We use these three adjectives indifferently to describe the groups we are studying, as well as their practice and teaching.

I must emphasize immediately that no sort of ritual or craft, indeed no sort of knowledge or practice, is *inherently* esoteric. These become esoteric when the society within which they exist regards and treats them as such. In different societies and cultures, different types of knowledge are considered esoteric. In societies in which, say, astrology is just part of the intellectual tradition, astrology is not esoteric, because it is not secret. When a society regards a body of knowledge as hidden this corresponds inversely to its practitioners’ view of the same knowledge, for they regard it as revealed or transmitted (but exclusively to them). The very configuration of secret groups and their hidden knowledge and practice is influenced by the surrounding society. To recap: I use the term esoteric to designate either knowledge or practice that is hidden from those outside a delimited social group or else to designate the said group.

Bearing this in mind we now consider the noun esotericism and particularly its use by scholars in the term Western Esotericism, the academic study of which has developed in recent decades. The Western esoteric tradition has crystallized since the Enlightenment. In that historical context, a particular group of movements and their teachings came to be called esoteric. The noun esotericism was coined two centuries ago to denote them. Using concepts originating in movements like

to perceive it. Nachmanides (1194–1270), in his commentary on the Torah, ends some of his mystically infused explanations with the words, “and the one who understands, will understand,” which Strauss might have used as a motto for his thesis. Frances Flannery-Dailey analyzed 4 Ezra in a structurally analogous way. She discerns in the book an exoteric meaning and an esoteric one, with the esoteric meaning being a presentation of seven stages of mystical revelation, whereas the exoteric meaning is the narrative and revelations dated to the exilic period. See Frances Flannery-Dailey (2012), “Esoteric Mystical Practice in Fourth Ezra and the Reconfiguration of Social Memory,” in Colleen Shantz and Rodney A. Werline (eds.), *Experientia, Volume 2: Linking Text and Experience* (Atlanta, GA: SBL), 45–70. This is an interesting idea, but sadly remains in the area of hypothesis until some further examples of outer and inner exegeses of the same sort or some information showing that groups existed that cultivated this particular sort of mystic discipline show up.

Hermetism, Christian Kabbalah, Theosophy, and others, these systems claimed to embody understanding of the hidden meaning of the world and of its phenomena.⁶ In our generation New Age teachings stand within this tradition.⁷ This sense of esoteric or esotericism is one I sedulously avoid.⁸ It generates confusion, as becomes evident in the following discussion of proposed definitions or descriptions of esotericism.

Antoine Faivre is a major figure in the modern study of Western Esotericism.⁹ In the first forty-eight pages of his book *Access to Western*

6. Consult Antoine Faivre (1994), *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, NY: SUNY), 4–5, on the issue of definition of Western Esotericism. See also Wouter J. Hanegraaff (1998), “The New Age Movement and the Esoteric Tradition,” in R. Van den Broek and Wouter Hanegraaff (eds.), *Gnosis and Hermeticism From Antiquity to Modern Times* (SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions; Albany, NY: SUNY), 359–382, and Hanegraaff (2006b), 336–340. Compare the remarks of Guy G. Stroumsa in (2005), *Hidden Wisdom. Esoteric Traditions & the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (SHR, 70; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 1. Jeff Levin gives a working definition and an overview of types of healing associated with modern esoteric teachings, which serve as an example of the prevalence of such worldviews down to the present. See Jeff Levin (2008), “Esoteric Healing Traditions: A Conceptual Overview,” *EXPLORE: The Journal of Science and Healing* 4(2): 101–112.

7. See Hanegraaff (1998). Consult further Antoine Faivre (1994), 4; see also his article of 1987, “Esotericism,” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, M. Eliade (ed.) (New York: Macmillan), 5.156–163. An example of Faivre’s influence is to be discerned in Christian H. Bull (2012), “The Notion of Mysteries in the Formation of Hermetic Tradition,” in Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (eds.), *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 76; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 399–426, who deals with the Hermetic tradition. Paul Oskar Kristeller traced the path by which Hermetic material reached Western Europe in the fifteenth century in Paul Oskar Kristeller (1938), *Marsilio Ficino e Lodovico Lazzarelli; contributo alla diffusione delle idee ermetiche nel rinascimento* (Bologna, Italy: Zanichelli). See also Faivre (1998), 113–114.

8. Moreover, in this book, I avoid the noun esotericism altogether. That word first appears at the beginning of the nineteenth century, designating the Renaissance and post-Renaissance phenomenon of “Western Esotericism”: see Hanegraaff (2006b), 337, and the introductory words to Chapter 2.

9. See for an assessment of his oeuvre, Arthur McCalla (2001), “Antoine Faivre and the Study of Esotericism,” *Religion* 31: 435–450 and URL <http://dx.doi.org/10.1006/reli.2001.0364>.

Esotericism he set forth its lines of filiation and their significance in considerable detail. For those studying Western Esotericism, Faivre's general description of esotericism¹⁰ has played an important role.¹¹ It accommodates a theoretical structure as well as some experimental and epistemological dimensions. This description, useful as it undoubtedly is for the study of Western Esotericism, proved vulnerable to criticism because of a circularity pointed out by Kocku von Stuckrad, another prominent scholar of the subject. Von Stuckrad set forth very clearly the problems inherent in Faivre's definition when he said that its difficulty was,

that Faivre extrapolated his typology from a very specific phase in modern religious history and thereby excluded other aspects from the outset. The result is tautology. To be specific: because Faivre mainly drew on Renaissance Hermetism, philosophy of nature, Christian Kabbalah and Protestant theosophy to generate his taxonomy, some areas are excluded from research which might actually be decisive for a comprehensive survey.¹²

10. Faivre (1994), 4–6. See further his previous discussion in 1987 in his article "Esotericism," in *The Encyclopedia of Religions*. That article is a very clear presentation of his position. From the point of view of the present study, however, it is largely irrelevant, because its focus is almost exclusively on Western Esotericism.

11. See the discussion by Kocku von Stuckrad (2005), *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox Publishing), 3–5, quoted here from p. 5; Henrik Bogdan (2010), "New Perspectives on Western Esotericism," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 13(3): 97–105, especially 100–101; Hanegraaff (2006b), 339–340.

12. Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (eds.) (2006a), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), writes about the treatment of Jewish and Islamic esoteric and mystical movements in the context of these self-conscious attempts to organize the discipline of the study of "Western Esotericism" (xi–xiii). They are included in his *Dictionary* as "influences" on Western Esotericism, rather than as part of it. In addition, he is of the view that the relative lack of interest in esoteric practice displayed in the definitions of Western Esotericism is related to Protestant rejection of Catholic ecclesiastical practices. Hanegraaff's critique of Faivre was developed earlier, in his article on methodology and definition published in 1995, which contains many significant observations, including some directed against the approach of Edward Tiryakian, discussed in §2.1, note 27: see Wouter J. Hanegraaff (1995), "Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism," *Method &*

Furthermore, we may add that in his discussion of Western Esotericism's ancestor movements in Late Antiquity, Faivre limits his consideration to Hermetism and a group of four other "non-Christian" movements: Neo-Pythagoreanism, Stoicism, Neo-Platonism, and Jewish Kabbalah.¹³ This choice is dictated by his understanding of Western Esotericism as it developed many centuries later and does not give a balanced view of esoteric movements in Hellenistic–Roman antiquity. My remark might be regarded as unfair, for Faivre does not intend to describe ancient esotericism as such. However, as the influence of his work is widespread, it is appropriate to stress here that a description of Hellenistic–Roman esotericism in its own historical context might well come to regard different movements and groups as central.

A widely quoted definition of esoteric by von Stuckrad proves similarly problematic from the perspective of Ancient Judaism.¹⁴ He writes:

What makes a discourse esoteric is the rhetoric of hidden truth, which can be unveiled in a specific way and established contrary to other interpretations of the universe and history—often that of the “institutionalized majority.”

Once again, from our perspective, a focus on features typical of Western Esotericism rather than on the way esoteric teachings and practice were understood in antiquity proves to be problematic.¹⁵

Theory in the Study of Religion 7(2): 99–129. Ra'anan Boustan (2015), “Secrets without Mystery: Esotericism in Early Jewish Mysticism,” *Aries – Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*, 15(1): 10–15, discusses a problematic aspect of von Stuckrad's description of the reception of Jewish Hekhalot mystical texts by Renaissance scholars.

13. Faivre (1994), 51–52. Annette Yoshiko Reed remarks pertinently on the Renaissance attitude to Jewish mysticism and the Talmud: Annette Yoshiko Reed (2013), “Rethinking (Jewish-) Christian Evidence for Jewish Mysticism,” in Ra'anan Boustan, Martha Himmelfarb, and Peter Schäfer (eds.), *Hekhalot Literature in Context: Between Byzantium and Babylonia* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck), 349–377, and especially 350–353.

14. Von Stuckrad (2005), 10.

15. On p. 10 von Stuckrad (2005) continues: “Mediation may be conceived as such a means: the link between hidden and revealed knowledge, between transcendence

In studies of Western Esotericism it is justified to attribute particular weight to its ancestor movements. However, if the object of study is esoteric groups, teachings, and practice in the Second Temple period, this particular weighting of certain ancient esoteric movements becomes a distorting factor. As was said, von Stuckrad found fault with Faivre’s description of Renaissance Esotericism because Faivre’s criteria of relevance were derived from modern Western Esotericism. Yet, when von Stuckrad himself deals with ancient esoteric teachings, he regards movements as particularly relevant, which are in various ways precursors of Western and particularly Renaissance Esotericism. Such movements were dominated by Stoicism, Pythagoreanism, and the Middle Platonic and later the Neo-Platonic tradition.¹⁶

The following formulation by another scholar of Western Esotericism, Wouter Hanegraaff, is closer in some respects to my own view:

the term¹⁷ is commonly associated with the notion of ‘secrecy,’ and then stands for the practice in various religious contexts of reserving certain

and immanence, is frequently attributed to specific authorities—for example Hermes or Zoroaster—who act as mediators and place a ‘perfect’ knowledge at the disposal of human beings. That eternal knowledge, the *philosophia perennis*, can be achieved by some distinguished persons even without mediation, but the notion of a chain of ‘initiates’ and sages, who determine the course of revelation, is a recurrent motif in the history of esotericism from ancient times up until the present. This claim to knowledge is often combined with an emphasis on individual experience, wherein a seeker attains higher knowledge through extraordinary states of consciousness.” Von Stuckrad’s treatment of the Merkabah literature is critiqued by Ra’anan Boustan (2015), 10–15. Samuel Thomas has some pertinent remarks on his concentration on Western Esotericism: See Samuel Thomas (2009), *The “Mysteries” of Qumran: Mystery, Secrecy, and Esotericism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (SBLJL, 25; Atlanta, GA: SBL), 48. In a recent article, von Stuckrad returned to his critique of Faivre, stressing the importance of pre-Renaissance developments of “philosophical, scientific, and religious discourses” that provided roots from which “Renaissance Esotericism” drew sustenance. See Kocku von Stuckrad (2015), “Ancient Esotericism, Problematic Assumptions, and Conceptual Trouble,” *Aries – Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 15: 16–20.

16. See von Stuckrad (2005), 13, who looks to Hellenistic Egypt, Pythagoreanism, and Stoicism for an Egyptian mix and thinks that the Western tradition emerged from something like that. See also Christian H. Bull (2012).

17. Here he is talking about “esotericism,” using a broader definition than I would.

kinds of salvific knowledge for a selected elite of initiated disciples. . . . In this typological sense, the term ‘esotericism’ can be applied freely within any religious context, for concerns with secret knowledge reserved for elites can be found throughout history, and all over the world: in pre-literate and literate societies, from antiquity to the present, in east and west.¹⁸

This description is accurate as far as it goes, but I have two reservations about it. In my view it is not correct as far as Judaism in the Second Temple period is concerned to limit the term’s applicability to “religious contexts” and its content to “salvific knowledge.” The reasons for this judgment are the following: First, in the Hellenistic–Roman period the realm denoted by “religious” was much broader and more pervasive than in modern, post-Enlightenment societies.¹⁹ Furthermore, the requirement that the knowledge be salvific or redemptive excludes other types of knowledge that may have been transmitted in secret societies or groups. For example, can priestly temple traditions, such as the details of how to make incense or the showbread, which are known and transmitted only to members of a specific familial group, be called “salvific?”²⁰

18. Hanegraaff (2006b), 337. This view is not the one Hanegraaff considers relevant for his own work on Western Esotericism. He gives it in the course of a discussion leading up to his presentation of his own ideas, which he expounds on pp. 337–338 of the said work.

19. See the remarks of Annette Yoshiko Reed (2007), “Was There Science in Ancient Judaism? Historical and Cross-Cultural Reflections on ‘religion’ and ‘science,’” *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 36(3–4): 461–495, especially 463 and 470.

20. According to rabbinic sources, the Gamru priestly family cultivated the knowledge of how to make the showbread and the Abtinas family knew how to manufacture the incense: see *mYoma* 3:11; *jYoma* 3:9 and 38b. In those passages there is further information about certain families transmitting specific priestly secrets. Andrei A. Orlov (2015), *Divine Scapegoats: Demonic Mimesis in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press), 12, forwards the view that in *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13, Yahoel appears “to function as a senior cultic celebrant explaining and demonstrating rituals to a junior sacerdotal servant, namely, Abraham.” The same pattern, drawn from the Temple cult, recurs, he maintains, in *Apocalypse of Abraham* 14:1–8. Sarah Iles Johnston (2007), “Mysteries,” in S.I. Johnston (ed.), *Ancient Religions* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 98–111, touches on cultic acts in Greek contexts whose secret was held specifically by certain sacerdotal families or practitioners (p. 108).

Apparently not by this definition, although they are secret and imparted within a clearly delimited social group, and thus may or should be called esoteric.²¹ Finally, the dimension of esoteric practice is ignored almost completely.²²

Antoine Faivre poses this question: "Are all esotericisms necessarily bound to the notion of secrecy?" He responds later in the same paragraph that "Disciplina arcani means chiefly this: the mysteries of religion, the ultimate nature of reality, hidden forces in the cosmic order, hieroglyphs of the visible world none of which lends itself to literal understanding."²³ Neither do such lend themselves to a univocal explanation but rather must be the object of progressive multileveled penetration,"²⁴ and he adds, "secrecy does not seem to us a component of esotericism qua esotericism."²⁵ This may be true of Western Esotericism but is not the case for ancient times. Indeed, I regard secrecy as a central, constitutive element of secret, esoteric groups in Hellenistic–Roman antiquity.

Other fields of learning have also actively pursued the meaning of secret or esoteric. The sociologist Edward Tiryakian said in 1972 that esotericism "is a secret knowledge of the reality of things, of hidden truths, handed down, frequently orally²⁶ and not all at once, to a relatively small number of persons who are typically ritually initiated by

21. This raises the issue of trade guilds of which the most famous Near Eastern representatives were scribal guilds such as are known to have existed in Mesopotamia, as well as those of diviners and foretellers. The esoteric character of some of them is discussed in Chapter 3, as well as their claimed influences on some realms of knowledge cultivated by the Jews (see §3.1 and notes 14, 15 in that section). The subject of guilds in the ancient Near East deserves a fuller, separate discussion. Initiation into craft guilds is described by Johnston (2007), 106–107. See further Bull (2015), 128.

22. In a helpful review essay Henrik Bogdan discusses the state of the study of Western Esotericism in the context of works by Wouter Hanegraaff, Kocku von Stuckrad, Arthur Versluis, and Hugh B. Urban. See Bogdan (2010), 97–105.

23. By which he means "Western Esotericism."

24. Faivre (1994), 32.

25. Faivre (1994), 32. And indeed, *as he defines it*, this is exact. In line with this limitation, he remarks on p. 6 that "[t]here is no ultimate secret once we determine that everything, in the end, conceals a secret."

26. See Chapter 3, §3.2, note 20.

those already holding this knowledge.”²⁷ Too narrow a focus on “a secret knowledge of the reality of things” mars this otherwise useful description; it cannot serve as an exclusive tool to use in the study of secret groups in ancient Judaism. We have seen that this limitation in Tiryakian’s definition is symptomatic of the various definitions of Western Esotericism.

Ithamar Gruenwald proposes a definition of esotericism based on assumptions that are different from our own. He says, in a significant discussion of inner exegesis of Scripture that, “‘Esotericism’ thus is here taken to mean a special attitude towards Scripture and the explanation of its content. . . . Scripture is considered a code, the indications for the decipherment of which are given in a special revelation.”²⁸ There is no doubt that Gruenwald is pointing to an important phenomenon, and one to which some discussion is dedicated in Chapter 4, §4.3, but this use of the term esotericism differs from that of all the

27. Edward A. Tiryakian (1972), “Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78: 491–512, quote from p. 499. On pp. 497–500 of this interesting article, Tiryakian draws a distinction between “occult” and “esoteric.” His analysis is basically focused on the modern recrudescence of “occultism” in the decade preceding his publication in 1972. By “esotericism” he meant the sort of worldview presupposed by those writing about Western Esotericism.

28. Ithamar Gruenwald (2014), *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism, Second Revised Edition*, (AJEC, 90; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 62, and compare 62–66. See in greater detail Ithamar Gruenwald (1988), *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism* (Beiträge zur Erforschung des alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums, 14; Frankfurt am Main: Lang), 58–59. An analogous understanding of inner or esoteric teaching was proposed vis-à-vis the Gospel of Philip by Louis Painchaud (2012), “Joseph le Charpentier planta un jardin,” (EvPhil 73,8–9) sens apparent et sens caché dans l’Évangile selon Philippe,” in Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (eds.), *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 76; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 107–117. He speaks, on p. 115, of a heuristic model that might be regarded as thoroughly postmodern: The real meaning of the text resides not in the text itself, but in the reader, the seeker after wisdom and insight. Gruenwald’s view of outer and inner exegeses of the biblical texts resembles to some extent those of Strauss (1941) and Flannery-Daily (2012).

scholars previously mentioned.²⁹ Therefore, his use of esotericism does not serve as a link in the chain of this term’s development that we are tracing here.

It is important to include in this review the definition and description that are found in Samuel Thomas’s interesting book on the term “mystery” at Qumran. He dedicated an introductory chapter of this book largely to a valiant attempt to clarify and to distinguish among the terms esoteric, mystery, and secret. For him, the term mystery denotes portentous secrets and is clearly related to esoteric knowledge. As a natural outcome of his particular focus on the Qumran covenanters, he is led to stress the salvific nature of hidden or secret knowledge at Qumran.³⁰ Thus, in one place he says that, “[a]t a few points the *Damascus Document* is explicit about the relationship between knowledge of ‘hidden things’ [נסתרות] and redemption, and about the atoning power of God’s ‘mysteries of wonder’ [רזי פלא]. Those who are ‘outside the wall’ [CD 4:19] are finally people without any insight at all [בינה אין בהם]. Correct knowledge—limited,

29. Compare the OED definition of esotericism discussed in §2.1, note 4.

30. Thomas (2009). Of course, his stress on “mystery” originates in part from its use in the New Testament, concerning which there is a good deal of scholarly literature: See for a detailed outline Gunther Bornkamm (1967), art. “μυστήριον, μυσῶ” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel (ed.) and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (trans. and ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 4.802–828. Another example is Benjamin I. Gladd’s book (2008), *Revealing the Mysterion: the Use of Mystery in Daniel and Second Temple Judaism with its Bearing on First Corinthians* (BZNW, 160; Berlin: de Gruyter). A second source nurturing this interest in mystery is the study of Greek mystery religions by scholars of the “Religionsgeschichtliche Schule” in the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century. Doubtless the stimulus of the same New Testament usage ultimately stood behind this stream of research too. The literature exhibiting this connection between the New Testament term and scholarly interest in phenomena of Judaism and Greco-Roman religion is extensive; see Walter Burkert (1987), *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Carl Newell Jackson Lectures, 1982; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press); Marvin W. Meyer (1992), “Mystery Religions,” in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday), 4.941–945, and much more bibliography exists. If the central function of the mystery religions is presented as guaranteeing immortality, the “salvific” element is most often stressed and the commonality with the New Testament usage highlighted.

special, esoteric knowledge—is presumed a necessary precursor to election and, by extension, to salvation.”³¹

Thomas’s study appertains to a body of research investigating the term mystery (= Hebrew and Aramaic *raz*) at Qumran that has developed in recent years.³² The prominence of the still-obscure expression מְסִתֵּר (often translated as “the mystery that is to come”) in 4QInstruction, a text which was fully published in 1969, greatly stimulated this direction of research.³³ The central role of the mystery that is to come in 4QInstruction has, in turn, drawn attention to the uses of the term in other Qumran works as well.³⁴ Of course, interest in the striking term mystery as it is used in certain Qumran documents is fuelled by the occurrence of μυστήριον [mysterion] in the New Testament, most

31. Thomas (2009), 67. See the remarks of Carol A. Newsom (2004), *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran* (STDJ, 52; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 74: “The Qumran community, by contrast, carefully regulated transactions in knowledge. Knowledge played a central role for the community as an instrument of social definition. Relationship to knowledge is what forms the boundary between the sect and the outside world.” The view Newsom expresses here is one with which I fully agree.

32. On the Persian provenance of the word *raz*, see Thomas (2009), 245–251. See further Thomas (2009), Bornkamm (1967), Gladd (2008), Burkert (1987), and Meyer (1992).

33. On this expression, see also Daniel J. Harrington (1996), “The ‘raz nihyeh’ in a Qumran Wisdom Text (1Q26, 4Q415–418, 423) [in: Hommage à Józef T. Milik],” RQ 17: 549–553.

34. Matthew J. Goff (2003b), *The Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom of 4QInstruction* (STDJ, 50; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill) is a most significant work; see also Daniel J. Harrington (2003), “Wisdom and Apocalyptic in 4QInstruction and 4 Ezra,” in Florentino García Martínez (ed.), *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition* (BETL, 168; Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press and Peeters), 343–355. Thorleif Elgvin (1998), “The Mystery to Come: Early Essene Theology of Revelations,” in Frederick H. Cryer and Thomas L. Thompson (eds.), *Qumran between the Old and New Testaments* (JSOTSup, 290; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press), 113–150, especially 129–134, places 4QInstruction chronologically before 1QS and sees “the mystery to come” as revealed and eschatological wisdom. Enoch knows the mystery that he read on the heavenly tablets (1 Enoch 103). On *raz* and mysteries, see Shani Tzoref (2010), “The ‘Hidden’ and ‘Revealed’: Esotericism, Election, and Culpability in Qumran and Related

frequently in Paul's epistles. In the New Testament it occurs twenty-eight times in all and seems to denote hidden religious knowledge or salvific secrets.³⁵ Samuel Thomas views the esoteric-knowledge-signaled mystery as salvific (as Hanegraaff does), and his research starts with questions engendered at least in large measure by the New Testament's, particularly Paul's, use of *μυστήριον*.

Justifiably concerned that his specific focus on Qumran mystery poses an obstacle to the balanced assessment of Qumran secrecy, Thomas writes, "[m]y assertion is that the secrets most guarded by the Qumran group are the ones that pertain to 'mysteries,' and that there are other kinds of secrets that are distinct from the epistemological domain of 'mystery.'"³⁶ Here, the added weight he attributes to mystery seems to beg the question. He himself continues and says that there are secrets that are not mysteries and which "might include, for example, sectarian halakhah, which is often characterized under the rubric of 'hidden things' [נסתרות]. Even this distinction is perhaps somewhat artificial given the relatively seamless and dynamic relationship between scriptural interpretation, religious experience, and other expressions of knowledge claims in Qumran texts" (p. 41). Thomas does not infer the distinction among *raz* and other terms for hidden or secret knowledge from writings found at Qumran, and it remains difficult to isolate a systematically consistent difference among *raz* and other types of hidden knowledge such as נסתרות in the Qumran use of the terms. Despite this difficulty, recent research on *raz* in the Dead Sea Scrolls is helpful in our investigation.³⁷

Literature," in Lawrence H. Schiffman and Shani Tzoref (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls at 60* (STDJ, 89; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 299–324, especially 308–311.

35. Gunther Bornkamm (1967), "μυστήριον, μυσῶ," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel (ed.) and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (trans. and ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 4.802–828.

36. Thomas (2009), 41.

37. The most discussed of these uses of *raz* is the נהיה רז in 4QInstruction: see §2.1, note 30. Of course, in older texts, "mystery" denotes various celestial secrets; see, e.g., 1 *Enoch* 9:6, 10:7.

Thus we have examined a number of different understandings of esoteric and found them wanting in some way, and so we can reaffirm our initial position. Esoteric describes knowledge or practice whose transmission is limited to socially distinct and self-delimited groups. Somewhat analogous to “magic” in modern discussions,³⁸ it is the social situation and function, together with the power relationships inherent in them, that determine the meaning of esoteric.³⁹ If so, then

38. The problems with the modern distinctions among “religion,” “science,” and “magic” are noted, for example, in Philip S. Alexander (1997), “Wrestling against Wickedness in High Places: Magic in the Worldview of the Qumran Community,” in Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans (eds.), *The Scrolls and the Scriptures: Qumran Fifty Years After* (JSPSup, 26; 318–337, especially 318–319) and in Annette Yoshiko Reed (2014), “Gendering Heavenly Secrets? Women, Angels, and the Problem of Misogyny and ‘Magic,’” in K. Stratton (ed.), *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 108–151, especially 128–129. Observe Ben-Dov’s analogous reservations about the use of the term magic, of which he says: “I find little merit in the use of the term ‘magic,’ whose modern connotations are utterly anachronistic and do not reflect the intentions and setting of the ancient authors”: Jonathan Ben-Dov (2010), “Scientific Writings in Aramaic and Hebrew at Qumran: Translation and Concealment,” in Katell Berthelot and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (eds.), *Aramaica Qumranica: Proceedings of the Conference on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran in Aix-en-Provence, 30 June–2 July 2008* (STDJ, 94; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 379–399, especially 380. Ida Fröhlich, for example, uses magic to characterize a very broad class of teachings: see Ida Fröhlich (2010), “Theology and Demonology in Qumran Texts,” *Henoch* 32(1): 101–129, especially 115–120. A sensitive and insightful treatment of rabbinic magic, including *Sefer Ha-Razim*, is to be found in Judah Goldin (1988a), “The Magic of Magic and Superstition,” in idem., Barry L. Eichler and Jeffery H. Tigay (eds.), *Studies in Midrash and Related Literature* (Philadelphia, New York, & Jerusalem: JPS), 337–357. Yuval Harari (2011b), “Jewish Magic: Delineation and Remarks,” *Il Presente* 5: 13*–85* (in Hebrew) has a good overview of Second Temple period Jewish magic and on pp. 24*–27* points out that the literature of the period that mentions magic does so in the context of demonology.

39. See Yuval Harari (2011a), “A Different Spirituality or ‘Other’ Agents? On the Study of Magic in Rabbinic Literature,” in D.V. Arbel and A.A. Orlov (eds.), *With Letters of Light: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Apocalypticism, Magic, and Mysticism in Honor of Rachel Eilior* (Berlin & New York: de Gruyter), 169–195. In Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith (1999), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University), 2–4, there is a good discussion of the opposition that is set up between magic and

a specifically “religious” dimension is not a necessary characteristic of the esoteric, though it frequently appears: Indeed, we should consider various sorts of limited and secret transmissions of diverse types of knowledge and practice as falling within its pale.

To conclude this discussion, I should state clearly that the focus of this study is on ancient Jewish esoteric groups. Thus, for this endeavor the weight of precursors of Western Esotericism, however important they may be for studying its origins, is not necessarily greater than any other aspect of the ancient evidence that is available to the student wishing to understand ancient esoteric groups. Indeed, I wish to cast my line in a direction determined as little as possible by subsequent developments, be they Western Esotericism or ramifications of Paul’s use of mystery. My understanding of esoteric or secret is firmly anchored in social context, and I hold that neither knowledge nor practice is inherently esoteric. It is only their transmission by secret groups that makes them so.⁴⁰ The evidence available for Ancient Judaism’s secret groups will be illuminated by contemporary and comparative source materials, drawn mainly from the Hellenistic–Roman world, rather than by consideration of those ancient movements that happen to be precursors of Western Esotericism.⁴¹

religion, highlighting the illogicality of distinctions drawn on an evolutionary basis with colonialist overtones. See further Meyer and Smith (1999), 13.

40. A somewhat different tack is taken by Meyer and Smith (1999) who, in commenting on Egyptian magical texts, remark on p. 17 that “[d]espite the prevalence of the use of ritual power on an everyday or household level, there is an insistence on secrecy with regard to knowledge and dissemination of rituals.”

41. Faivre (1994), 32–33, maintains that, “secrecy does not seem to us a component of esotericism *qua* esotericism,” and his view is discussed on p. 21. He is clearly referring to Western Esotericism for the reverse is true of the ancient world. Indeed, as I previously said, by definition, secrecy is constitutive of all such groups. This contrasts starkly with the situation obtaining in Western Esotericism as it is described by Hanegraaff (2006b), 338, according to whom, “the question of whether the currents in question included initiations into secret knowledge or opposed some ‘inner’ knowledge to mere ‘external’ religiosity is irrelevant as a criterion for what does and does not count as ‘esoteric’: emphases on secrecy and interiority can certainly be found within quite a few of the historical currents just listed, but they are absent in many others, and therefore cannot be seen as defining characteristics.”

The same view is also clearly expressed in Albert de Jong's emphasis on the social aspect of secrecy, epitomized when he says, "[t]he only fruitful way to study secrecy in ancient cultures and religions is to study it as a social phenomenon."⁴² Following in the footsteps of Georg Simmel's sociological analysis of secret societies, published in 1906—still the best—de Jong notes that three activities constitute secrecy: concealing, keeping hidden, and revealing.⁴³ This seems obvious, but the implications of these actions relate to power. These activities give the possessor of secret knowledge power vis-à-vis the one who does not possess it, particularly if that nonpossessor wishes to gain this secret knowledge.⁴⁴ It is clear therefore that cultivation of secrecy increases the power of those who know the secret in contrast with those ignorant of it. The more others value the secret, be it knowledge or praxis, the greater the power of the cognoscenti becomes.⁴⁵ "Knowledge becomes more valuable precisely because few can acquire it," says Tamsyn

42. Albert de Jong (2006), "Secrecy," in Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 1050–1054, especially p. 1050. See §2.2, note 47.

43. De Jong (2006), Simmel (1906). Thomas (2009), 40, says that, "It seems that . . . appeals to mystery language are inherently bound up in the complex dynamic of secrecy and disclosure, whether in the theological or in the interpersonal sense. There can be no such thing as a secret without the potential for its disclosure—or at the very least, a secret loses its potency and rationale if disclosure is not always possible or imminent. The very appeal to a divine or human 'mystery' itself presumes an unveiling, and such an appeal is usually also a claim to knowledge that is restricted to a particular group."

44. The early Pythagoreans who were organized as a secret group encountered significant hostility as is clear in the fourth century BCE massacres of Pythagoreans and burnings of their institutions in Southern Italy: see Polyb. 2.39.1–2. Gábor Betegh (2013), "Pythagoreans and the Derveni Papyrus," in F. Sheffield and J. Warren (eds.), *Companion to Ancient Philosophy* (London: Routledge), 79–93, ca. pp. 84–85.

45. Newsom (2004), 75, remarks, using Baumgarten's image of Jewish sects as marketers of intellectual merchandise, that "the Qumran sectarians not only staked out the high end of the market but also enhanced the desirability of their goods by making them so difficult to inspect or obtain." The concept of value is a significant operative in some analyses of secrecy: See Lawrence E. Hazelrigg (1969), who puts forward the proposition, relating to secret societies, "The more the value of an idea, object, activity, or sentiment is predicated on the restricted distribution of

Barton.⁴⁶ With this general framework in mind, I offer some thoughts concerning the functioning of secrecy in Ancient Judaism.

2.2 SECRECY

Secrecy⁴⁷ is a crucial constitutive factor of ancient esoteric groups,⁴⁸ and therefore it is important for us to think about the functioning of secrecy and secret societies. Within Ancient Judaism, as is subsequently shown, certain books, traditions, ideas, and practices were transmitted only in limited circles. However, the transmission, the preservation, and the employment of such secret books, knowledge, or practices require a social context. That context is necessarily a secret society, a group dedicated to the preservation, cherishing, and transmission of the corpus of special knowledge.

The parade example of a secret society in Ancient Judaism is that of the Qumran covenanters whose identification as a particular group of Essenes is most likely. The Qumranites exhibited two features typical of secret societies: a graded process of admission and a hierarchical social organization. These two features are presented in detail in Chapter 4, §4.3.⁴⁹ What is clear from external information, that is, from Philo, Josephus, Pliny, Hippolytus, and other Greek and Latin sources, and from internal information, such as the “sectarian” scrolls, is that those who became full members of the group were bound by oath to keep its teaching and practice secret.⁵⁰

information about that idea, object, activity, or sentiment, the more likely those persons who so define the value will organize as a secret society” (p. 326). The continuation of that article shows development of this concept of value.

46. Tamsyn Barton (1994), *Ancient Astrology* (London & New York: Routledge), 136.

47. De Jong (2006), 1050–1054, is most helpful. The first pages of Daniel Jütte (2015), *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the Economy of Secrets 1400–1800*, Jeremiah Riemer (trans.) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), also contain some interesting definitional remarks: See especially pp. 2–6.

48. See Faivre (1994), 32–33, and Hanegraaff (2006b), 338.

49. See Simmel (1906), 473–475, 478–479, and 488–489.

50. 1QS 5.7–13, cf. 9.16–17, 8.10–12, CD^a 15.8–11, etc. Morton Smith (1958), “The Description of the Essenes in Josephus and the *Philosophumena*,” *HUCA*

Thus we have a marvellous instance of various types of information combining to show that a secret society did exist in Ancient Judaism. The Qumran covenanters cultivated teaching and practice that were kept hidden, secret, and esoteric and were communicated to initiates in stages.⁵¹ The group's literature preserved at Qumran is a clear example of such secret teaching that was concealed from society outside. This inference is more than just reasonable because nothing of its particular texts or its characteristic, special terminology entered the ongoing Jewish Hebrew and Aramaic tradition. The dearth outside Qumran of this distinctive Qumranite terminology reinforces the conclusion that these books were secret.⁵²

2.3 RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND THE CLAIM OF AUTHORITY

The group's books were kept secret very zealously. This may lead us to wonder what authority was claimed for the secret knowledge and practice cultivated and transmitted at Qumran. The zeal for secrecy, after all, reflects an attitude of highest reverence toward the group's writings, teachings, and practice. Did the covenanters consider the source of their

29: 273–313, provides a table of comparison of Josephus's evidence and that of Philo on pp. 293–313. In Chapter 4, §4.3, we discuss the methodological issues arising from the study of both the external and the internal evidence for their practice, as well as the criteria used to determine which documents from Qumran were characteristic of the group. See on oaths, Simmel (1906), 472–473, and the whole of Chapter 5.

51. See §2.1, note 40.

52. I have argued, and I am not the first to do so, that the *Damascus Document* that turned up in the Cairo Geniza as well as at Qumran most probably became current through an archeological find in the latter part of the first millennium CE: See Michael E. Stone (2003a), "Aramaic Levi Document and Greek Testament of Levi," in Shalom Paul et al. (eds.), *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Emanuel Tov* (Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 429–437. In addition, the possible connection between the Qumran material and Karaism, if it is ultimately borne out, may be due to the

special knowledge and practice to be celestial or otherworldly in origin? Were the teachings and practice of the *Yahad* thought to be authoritative because they had been learned in the course of some sort of religious experience, such as a vision?

In the literature of the Second Temple period, secret, special knowledge was often claimed to derive from an otherworldly source or experiential revelation of some sort. It may be a heavenly revelation granted in the course of a visionary ascent or a trance, or else during the ascent of the soul/consciousness.⁵³ Other means of acquisition of

same or a similar discovery. Naphtali Wieder (2005), *The Judean Scrolls and Karaism: A Reproduction of the First Edition with Addenda, Corrigenda and Supplementary Articles* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute) argued for that connection early on in scrolls research. See further on this in Chapter 6, point 7, *Qumranite elements in Karaism*.

53. Angela Kim Harkins (2012), *Reading with an “I” to the Heavens: Looking at the Qumran Hodayot through the Lens of Visionary Traditions* (Ekstasis: Religious Experience from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, 3; Boston: De Gruyter) argues throughout her book that the *Hodayot* [*Thanksgiving Hymns*], which are written in the first person, were intended to be read in such a way as to induce religious experience by identification of the mindful reader with the experience of the “I” of the hymns, and indeed, on occasion to surpass that experience. See pp. 26–29, which are particularly relevant. If she is right, this type of reading-induced experience seems to be different from that of Ephrem Syrus quoted on p. 34. This approach is supported to some extent by the results emerging from the psychological anthropology research into kataphatic prayer such as that presented in Tanya M. Luhrmann, H. Nusbaum, and R. Thisted (2013), “‘Lord, Teach Us to Pray’: Prayer Practice Affects Cognitive Processing” *JOCC* 13: 159–177. Angela Kim Harkins’s approach differs from that of Carol Newsom: See Newsom (2004), 213–215, and indeed the whole chapter. Newsom stresses that intertextual connections between the *Hodayot* and the Bible play a most significant part in the formation of sectarian subjectivity. “It is in the act of telling before God what God has caused him to know that the speaker receives and appropriates his identity” (p. 215). Similarly, Philip S. Alexander (2006), *Mystical Texts* (Library of Second Temple Studies, 61; London & New York: T & T Clark), 90–91, speaks of the ascent as part of the praxis of the Qumran community; Lorenzo DiTommaso says, “The first purpose of any apocalyptic text is to disclose information from the transcendent reality”: see Lorenzo DiTommaso (2014), “Pseudonymity and the Revelation of John,” in John Ashton (ed.), *Revealed Wisdom: Studies in Apocalyptic in Honour of Christopher Rowland* (AJEC, 88; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 305–315. The quotation is from p. 312.

such heavenly knowledge are also mentioned, such as dreams,⁵⁴ the discovery of books of ancient wisdom, secrets revealed by elders, mystagogues, or seers, and more.

It is possible to some extent to determine the status and function for the Qumran group of knowledge based on religious experience. In a number of places in the sectarian writings, “knowledge” and secrets and their revelation by God are discussed.⁵⁵ In a well-known passage, the author of 1QpHab makes the very significant claim that secrets embedded in Habakkuk’s prophecy and that the prophet himself did not know were revealed to the Teacher of Righteousness (1QpHab 7:4–7).⁵⁶ It seems, therefore, that one part of the secret knowledge available to admitted members of the Qumran group was thought to have been communicated through revelatory experience.

In addition, it seems quite probable that the Qumranians cultivated the practice of focused, text-centered reading and study that encouraged and led to revelation through inspired exegesis.⁵⁷ When we consider the

54. See Robert Karl Gnuse (1996), *Dreams and Dream Reports in the Writings of Josephus* (AJEC, 36; Leiden, The Netherlands, New York, & Cologne, Germany: Brill), 144–145.

55. See, for example, §2.1, note 34. The association of God with knowledge and his revelation of knowledge to humans is a commonplace in the Dead Sea Scrolls. See 1QS 4:22, 11:15–16, 4Q511 fg 18 col. 2:8, 1QH^a top 26:14–15, etc.

56. The relevant text is the following: “When it says, ‘so that with ease someone can read it,’ this refers to the Teacher of Righteousness to whom God made known all the mysteries [רִי] of the words of his servants the prophets.” Ithamar Gruenwald discussed the radical nature of this passage in Gruenwald (2014), 61. García Martínez acutely remarks how similar 1QpHab 7:4–7 and 4 Ezra 12:11–12 are: “The eagle which you saw coming up from the sea is the fourth kingdom which appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel. 12 But it was not explained to him as I now explain it to you.” See Florentino García Martínez (2007), “Traditions Common to 4 Ezra and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar (ed.), *Qumranica Minora I* (STDJ, 63; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 153–167. The implications of 4 Ezra 12:11–12 are discussed in Michael E. Stone (1990), *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress), 366. Both instances are reinterpretations of previous revelations, stating that the earlier seer did not understand the revelation as the later individual, the Teacher of Righteousness or “Ezra,” did.

57. Alex P. Jassen (2007), *Meditating the Divine: Prophecy and Revelation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism* (STDJ, 68; Leiden, The

group's patterns of Torah study and 1QpHab 7:8–10's assertions about the Teacher of Righteousness's exegetical prowess, we are led in this direction. Another approach is forwarded by Angela Kim Harkins, who maintains that experience-based knowledge is also evident in prayer texts and meditations such as the *Hodayot* [*Thanksgiving Hymns*] and *Bareki Napši* texts. Her interest is predominantly in the use of prayer texts as a means of entering an alternative state of consciousness. Preparation for prayer may include weeping, fasting, and affliction or despair and evocation of the emotional experiences as described in the *Hodayot*.⁵⁸ This process, though also text centered, differs from the experience described by Ephrem Syrus in *Hymns on Paradise*, 1.3. He describes reading and meditating on Genesis: "My tongue read the story's outward narrative, while my intellect took wing and soared upward in awe as it perceived

Netherlands: Brill), 35–36, argues that the inspired exegesis of the Teacher of Righteousness is, in fact, the same sort of exegesis as is carried out by the author of the *Pesher on Habakkuk* (V. Hillel). On continual revelation in the sect and its connection with exegesis of prophecy, see Flusser's remarks in David Flusser (2007), "The Secret Things Belong to the Lord (Deut 29:29): Ben Sira and the Essenes," in *Judaism of the Second Temple Period, Qumran and Apocalypticism*, A. Yadin (trans.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 293–298, especially p. 296.

58. On religious experience tied to or induced by exegesis of sacred texts, see Daniel Merkur (2011), "Cultivating Visions through Exegetical Meditations," in Daphna Arbel and Andrei A. Orlov (eds.), *With Letters of Light: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Apocalypticism, Magic, and Mysticism: in Honor of Rachel Elijor* (Berlin: de Gruyter), 62–91. On ancient techniques of reading, see also the illuminating work of Mary Carruthers (1998), *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images 400–1200* (Cambridge Studies in Mediaeval Literature, 34; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press). Compare Guy G. Stroumsa (2015a), *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford Studies in the Abrahamic Religions; Oxford: Oxford University Press), 30, 54. I express my thanks to Prof. Stroumsa who graciously put a proof set of this book at my disposition. See also, from a somewhat different perspective, Angela Kim Harkins (2010), "Reading the Qumran *Hodayot* in Light of the Traditions Associated with Enoch," *Henoch* 32(2): 359–400. Describing the function of reading in the *Hodayot*, she says, "This practice of reading is one in which the reader seeks to reenact the affective experiences described in the text, creating the subjectivity of the lyrical subject in himself": Harkins (2012), 3, 15–16. The aspects of her analysis that are significant for the

the splendour of Paradise—not indeed as it really is, but insofar as humanity is granted to comprehend it.”⁵⁹ Note that he was reading aloud as is clearly implied by, “My tongue read.” Philip Alexander discusses the recitation of prayers and hymns such as *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* to effect mystical “union.”⁶⁰ Let me be quite clear that I am not claiming that all of the group’s special knowledge was revealed in these ways.⁶¹ However, some of it certainly was. There is little more to add except for the following: Pseudepigraphical books containing revelations, that is, apocalypses, that were found among the Qumran scrolls, such as various of the documents constituting *1 Enoch* and other analogous works such as *Jubilees*, although marked with characteristics of the broader movement from which the *Yahad* sprang, do not exhibit its “sectually explicit” markers.⁶² Despite the fragmentary character of the Qumran library, it is

present study are summarized on pp. 270–271. See further Guy G. Stroumsa (2015b), “The New Self and Reading Practices in Late Antique Christianity,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 95: 1–18, especially 16–18. Comparative material of considerable interest is to be found in Tanya M. Luhrmann, Howard Nusbaum, and Ronald Thisted (2010), “The Absorption Hypothesis: Learning to Hear God in Evangelical Christianity” *American Anthropologist* 112: 66–78, which discusses scholarly study of the “consequences of specific ritual and prayer practices” on the ways “in which people experience abstract concepts physically through repeated enactment” (p. 68). See Thomas (2009), 44. He also analyzes the use of *sod* in liturgical texts on pp. 130–134.

59. See Sebastian P. Brock (intr. tr.) (1998), *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press), 78. Observe the limitation of human perception (“insofar as humanity is granted to comprehend it”), a theme we discuss in Chapter 6, §6.1.

60. Alexander (2006), 116. See also Carol A. Newsom (2012), “Religious Experience in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Two Case Studies,” in Colleen Shantz and Rodney A. Werline (eds.), *Experientia, Volume 2: Linking Text and Experience* (SBLEJL, 35; Atlanta, GA: SBL), 205–222, who says that this text reading was, “one of the ritual mechanisms by which the Qumran community’s belief in communion with the angels was actually experienced” (p. 216). Compare IQHa 11:23.

61. Boustani (2015), 12, in the context of the Hekhalot/Merkabah texts, argues against the connection some deem necessary between “esotericism” and knowledge of the ultimate reality through religious experience. His use of the word esotericism clearly relates to Western Esotericism.

62. Such works are not considered to have been composed by the *Yahad*, but by part of the same wing or broader movement. See Devorah Dimant (2005), “Between Sectarian and Non-Sectarian: The Case of the Apocryphon of Joshua,”

still perhaps significant that no Qumran sectarian representative of the genre “apocalypse” has been identified.⁶³

In the non-Jewish Hellenistic world as well, the knowledge transmitted in the course of accession to a secret religious group, or shown in the procedure of initiation to a mystery, had a mysterious and, at least in some measure, a superhuman or a heavenly origin.⁶⁴ It was sometimes attributed to an ancient sage or semidivine figure, such as Zoroaster.⁶⁵ Often the ancient sources do not specify whether this knowledge was revealed by a teacher or a mystagogue, whether in a vision, in a dream, or during a heavenly ascent experience, or in some other revelatory mode.

We can, however, be more specific about the origins and to some extent the compass of special knowledge in the Jewish apocalypses. I addressed this issue in an article, “Lists of Revealed Things in Apocalyptic

in Esther G. Chazon, Devorah Dimant, and Ruth A. Clements (eds.), *Reworking the Bible: Apocryphal and Related Texts at Qumran* (STDJ, 58; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 105–134. See also Devorah Dimant (2009), “Sectarian and Non-Sectarian Writings in the Qumran Scrolls,” in Menahem Kister (ed.), *The Qumran Scrolls, Introductions and Studies, Volume 1* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute), 49–86 (in Hebrew). She has recently gone back to this topic in a most helpful way: See Devorah Dimant (2016), “The Library of Qumran in Recent Scholarship,” in Sidnie White Crawford and Cecilia Wassen (eds.) (2016), *The Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran and the Concept of a Library* (STDJ, 116; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 7–14.

63. On the genre apocalypse, see John J. Collins (1979), “Introduction: Towards a Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14: 1–20.

64. Jan N. Bremmer (2014), *Initiation into the Mysteries of the Ancient World* (Berlin & Boston: de Gruyter), 60 remarks concerning fifth-century Athens that, “[i]n the oral society that Athens largely still was in the later fifth century, books in religious activities could raise suspicion.” Consult further his remarks on p. 80 and elsewhere. Guy G. Stroumsa (2005), *Hidden Wisdom. Esoteric Traditions & the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (SHR, 70; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill) makes analogous remarks relating to suspicion evinced of early Christian pseudepigraphical writings; see pp. 39, 41, 71, etc. His explanation, however, is not based on orality as such, but on early statements about the heretical tendencies of such works. Indeed in his recent paper, Stroumsa (2015b) has teased out ambivalences in early Christian attitudes to the written word.

65. See §2.1, note 15.

Literature" published in 1976,⁶⁶ which was devoted to the formulaic lists of matters that were revealed to apocalyptic seers at the climax of visionary ascent experiences. In addition to the expected eschatological teaching, these lists included cosmological and meteorological knowledge, as well as calendarical and uranographic teachings. In that article I stressed the prominent role of such "speculative" knowledge in these lists.⁶⁷ A further very significant point that arises from the study of these lists should be highlighted in the present context. It is that the range of knowledge that the lists include does not coincide with the actual things that the apocalypses say the seers saw or learned in the course of their visionary experience.⁶⁸ Indeed, many subjects included in the lists do not correspond to anything at all in the apocalyptic ascent descriptions. Because these omitted subjects are presented within the highest revelation to the seer and yet not included in the ascent narratives, they may well be footprints left by a body of secret knowledge. The apocalyptic authors left us the "table of contents" as it were, of this body of knowledge but not the text of its chapters. If so, then at least in some instances

66. Michael E. Stone (1976), "Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature," in Werner Lemke, Patrick D. Miller, and Frank M. Cross Jr. (eds.), *Magnalia Dei, the Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (New York: Doubleday), 414–453. This is reprinted in Michael E. Stone (1991), *Selected Studies in the Pseudepigrapha with Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition* (SVTP, 9; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 379–418.

67. This article was published in 1976, and in those days, knowledge was usually related to the Wisdom Literature and not to the apocalypses. However, the place of knowledge and wisdom in the apocalypses has since been investigated and studied, and today their intertwined role in apocalyptic writings and thinking is widely accepted. This development has considerable ramifications. A good example of the closeness of their intertwining may be seen in Harrington (2003), 343–355.

68. See Stone (1976), 418–419. I am not asserting anything about the ontology of the things seen in visions, only about what the writers say was revealed. The Wisdom of Solomon too may belong somewhere in this category for purposes of the present discussion. Although it is a wisdom book in form, in Chapters 7 and 9 it relates incidents of revelation of secret knowledge. See Chapter 3, §3.1, note 14, on the relationship between sapiential and apocalyptic literatures.

that body of knowledge may have been part of an esoteric or hidden tradition current among the apocalyptic seers.⁶⁹

I make one final point in this connection: Certain revelatory books, though they claim to be esoteric or to have been transmitted secretly, actually circulated quite widely, or even very widely. Such characteristics are often found in the Jewish apocalypses and associated works that is, in writings such as *1 Enoch*, *4 Ezra*, and *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Were their authors simply using a rhetorical technique to enhance the verisimilitude of their writings or was there at least some actual social background to the esoteric claims of such writings? This question is subtler than a simple either-or answer can resolve.⁷⁰ Despite this, the exoteric circulation of this literature is certain and these books were both quoted and translated in antiquity.⁷¹ Therefore the revelatory Jewish apocalypses are “pseudo-esoteric”; though some of them also hint at esoteric traditions, they do not specify them in detail.⁷²

69. Of course, having taken their origin in a secret tradition, these elements might have entered the repertoire of literary topoi used by apocalyptic authors.

70. I have discussed these questions in some detail in Michael E. Stone (2003b), “A Reconsideration of Apocalyptic Visions,” *HTR* 96(2): 167–180 and idem. (2006a), “Pseudepigraphy Reconsidered,” *RRJ* 9: 1–15. David S. Russell describes the various claims made for apocalyptic revelations in (1964), *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster), 107–118. He does not distinguish, however, as I do, between esoteric and pseudo-esoteric writings.

71. Burns (2014), 28, evidences this difficulty when he says, “Second, the charge of ‘elitism’ fails to capture the goal of many esoteric claims, which is namely to become revealed (exoteric); Hermetic or apocalyptic literature, for example, is replete with the themes not just of secret knowledge but paraenesis and even mission (Corp. Herm. 1.29; 2 En 39).”

72. See Chapter 6, the latter half of §6.1, and Chapter 7, §7.2, entry 1, *Mysteries, Knowledge, and Secrets*, and entry 3, *The Forbidden Teaching of the Watchers and Its Transmission*.

CHAPTER 3

ESOTERIC AS A SOCIAL CATEGORY

Groups possessing certain special knowledge or practice and, by extension, the knowledge or practice so possessed, are characterized as esoteric or secret.¹ As I noted in Chapter 2, §2.1, the adjectives “esoteric” and “secret” in such contexts imply that the special knowledge is kept hidden by and within a delimited social group and withheld from outsiders. The words “esoteric” and “secret” in themselves say nothing about the nature and character of that knowledge or practice. They indicate the group’s social behavior. Some instances illustrate this point.

The oaths that the Essene initiates swore include the promise not to communicate “the names of the angels,”² yet numerous extant nonsectarian texts from the same time period record angelic names, including some texts that are found in the Qumran library.³ This difference in practice—one mentioning angelic names and the other prohibiting such mentions—serves to highlight the distinction that we just drew

1. I am not convinced, therefore, by Ron Hendel’s elegant argument that “The prior secrecy of the book is part of the liminal symbolism that makes the act of reading and understanding the book an apocalyptic initiation, a rite of passage into a higher identity. By reading the book of Daniel, one perceives the heavenly mysteries.” See Ronald S. Hendel (2008), “Isaiah and the Transition from Prophecy to Apocalyptic,” in Haim Cohen et al. (eds.), *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), 261–279, quote on p. 272.

2. See Chapter 5, §5.1. Josephus in the passages cited here talks of the Essenes: see *BJ* 2:142.

3. Such angelic names are rather uncommon in the sectarian documents, but do appear occasionally, such as in 1QM, if indeed that work originates in the Qumran sect, which is debated.

between the content of knowledge and the attitudes to it. This distinction cannot be overemphasized. The names of the angels are esoteric for the Essenes because it is forbidden to mention them, except to initiates; in themselves they are not secret.⁴ The people producing exoteric texts naming angels were, we may presume, not bound by oaths to keep them secret.⁵ Thus the social context in which documents⁶ or teachings were transmitted and circulated is the point at which actual secrecy enters the picture.

To speak as if secrecy created an unbridgeable chasm between revealed and secret knowledge and/or practice is, of course, an oversimplification. In fact, in many instances in the history of Judaism and Christianity (and perhaps of other traditions with which I am less familiar) there exists a mutual relationship between publicly circulated knowledge and secret tradition. The content of the secret tradition is determined in one way or another by the content of publicly transmitted learning, and this complex relationship needs exploring. This remark suggests an approach similar to applying a sort of “reverse engineering” to eschatological expectations, in which things hoped for in the ideal future identify the aporiae to which they are a response.⁷

4. One is reminded of the refusal of the “man” (presumably a celestial being) to reveal his name in Genesis 32:29. Names, of course, had special significance, and the changing of the patriarchs’ names is a good example.

5. Here I presume that texts not composed by the Qumran covenanters that transmit such information, such as *Jubilees* and 2 *Enoch*, were written with the intent of their being exoterically available. As far as the Jewish apocalypses are concerned, I consider this most likely: See my discussion in Chapter 2, the latter half of §2.3. In broader terms, this is not necessarily so, and texts originally intended for esoteric use could, in changed historical or social circumstances, enter general circulation.

6. Josephus explicitly mentions “books belonging to their sect” (*BJ* 2.142). In Chapter 7, §7.3, I discuss the issue of orally transmitted esoteric teaching in contrast to teachings committed to writing.

7. See Michael E. Stone (2011), *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 81, 9–10. Of course, at a more basic level, for example, we could approach Genesis 3:14–19 thus, seeing the curses as corresponding to the character of the Edenic state, or rather the Edenic state being inferred from the curses, which reflect a certain view of the world. An example of the interrelationship of “official” and “popular” religion during the century 1575–1676 is

A profile of the significance a society attaches to various activities or types of knowledge may have a great deal to do with determining the configuration of esoteric knowledge in that society, as it echoes or reacts to the broader social context. Similarly, a study of the things constituting secret knowledge or practice assists in analyzing the pattern of knowledge in the external society, though in neither case is this a simple one-to-one correspondence.

3.1 KNOWLEDGE AND THE CONTROL OF KNOWLEDGE

Lawrence Hazelrigg tellingly remarks that the secret is “the ultimate sociological form for the regulation of the flow and distribution of information. . . . It can control the very essence of social relations through manipulations of the ratio of ‘knowledge’ to ‘ignorance.’”⁸

described by Carlo Ginzburg (1983), *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London, Melbourne, & Henley, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul). There have been various reviews, some laudatory and some critical of this work. See, for example, the paper by John Martin (1992), “Journeys to the World of the Dead: The Work of Carlo Ginzburg,” *Journal of Social History*, 25(3): 613–626. Regardless, Ginzburg’s point that the expectations of the Inquisitors were major factors in the change of the self-understanding of the individuals he discusses has not been challenged. For a current survey and assessment of microhistory, see Andrew I. Port (2015), “History from Below, the History of Everyday Life and Microhistory,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edition, Volume 11 (Amsterdam: Elsevier), 108–113.

8. Lawrence E. Hazelrigg (1969). This might, for example, help us analyze the differences between the societies described in *Community Rule* and the *Damascus Document*. He is quite clear that these propositions need to be tested by comparison of different secret societies. He sets them forth on pp. 326–329 of his paper, and on pp. 329–330 he discusses possible ways of testing Simmel’s analysis. Other studies have looked at specific cases, such as Bonnie Erickson (1981), “Secret Societies and Social Structure,” *Social Forces* 60(1): 188–210, who discusses inbuilt difficulties in testing Simmel’s ideas because “Secret phenomena are in general impossible to sample” (pp. 190–193). See also H. B. Hawthorn (1956), “A Test of Simmel on the Secret Society: The Doukhobors of British Columbia,” *American Journal of Sociology* 62(1): 1–7. An earlier cognate paper is that by Camilla H.

Hazelrigg derives nine “propositions” from Simmel’s analysis of secret societies. These propositions are remarkably apt as ways of thinking of the Qumran society as the Dead Sea Scrolls present it.⁹ The propositions cover the dynamic of secrecy and of initiation, the function of hierarchy (“The secret society is formed out of the intentional, conscious planning efforts of individuals to construct a hierarchical organization for the complete control of a large subordinated group of people.” Hazelrigg [1969], p. 324), the secret society’s inclusiveness of the activity of its members, called its “greediness,” and their resulting isolation from “other interactional units.” He argues in his Proposition 7 that “the more extensive the secrecy of the secret society, the greater the tendency toward centralization of authority.”¹⁰

Such control of valued information is manifested by regulating access to it and equally therefore by controlling ignorance of it. Other features too emerge from the dynamic of this activity of regulation, including ritualization of access to the knowledge and maintenance of a hierarchical social structure, as well as an inherent tension between the secret group and the surrounding society.¹¹

Wedgwood (1930), “The Nature and Functions of Secret Societies,” *Oceania* 1(2): 129–145. Hugh Urban calls the problems secrecy raises for its students the “double bind of secrecy.” Its teaching is hidden from the outsider, while the initiate is prevented from telling it to an uninitiated audience. See Urban (1998), especially pp. 209–210. His discussion in the subsequent pages outlines the ethical and epistemological problems faced by the Western researcher into living secret traditions. The researcher either cannot know anything about the esoteric tradition or know whether what he or she is told is in hidden or coded discourse (epistemological problem). Alternatively, if the researcher himself or herself has been initiated and makes public secret teaching, he or she betrays the trust put in him or her (the ethical problem): See pp. 216–217. Our situation with inside and outside sources for historical traditions is not the same, but analogous epistemological doubts about the meaning of esoteric texts exist.

9. I mention Qumran specifically because of the extraordinary evidence we have available. The same may well have been true of other groups, for which such ample evidence is not at our disposal.

10. See Hazelrigg (1969), 328.

11. See Philip S. Alexander (2006), *Mystical Texts* (Library of Second Temple Studies, 61; London & New York: T & T Clark), 45, on tension with the surrounding society.

Regev makes the point that by their very existence, sectarian groups create an inherent cognitive tension or even antagonism, which is sometimes mutual, with the surrounding society, even if they are quite unknown. This tension is perhaps even generated by the secret practices, belief system, or knowledge of the esoteric group and is marked by antagonism with, separation from, and insistence on difference from the surrounding society.¹² Other research that tested Simmel's theoretical analysis of the structure and dynamic of secret societies has not controverted these main points. However, it should be stressed that there are real difficulties in testing.¹³ Moreover, it is at least unlikely that such analyses or propositions are universally or necessarily true, which does not detract from their utility in the study of ancient secret societies.

Another point at which secrecy has been adduced as a factor related to knowledge is the influence of scribal skills. In recent years scholars writing on the Second Temple period have increasingly stressed the wisdom and priestly–prophetic knowledge present in apocalyptic and other writings of that age. They have thus sought to show the influence of scribal schools and teaching on the Jewish writings of the Second Temple period.¹⁴ Thomas remarks that the “notion of a ‘scribal craft’ is found also in ancient Assyrian and Babylonian scribal circles.” And, quoting Alan Lenzi, he argues that this scribal craft in Mesopotamian traditions developed an association with

12. Regev (2007), 35; compare Samuel Thomas (2009), 66.

13. See note 8 in this chapter.

14. See the interesting book by David M. Carr (2005), *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press) on writing and scribalism. On wisdom and apocalyptic and the relationship between them, see Harrington (2003), and the whole volume edited by Florentino García Martínez (2003), *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition* (BETL 168; Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press & Peeters); Michael A. Knibb (1983), “Apocalyptic and Wisdom in 4 Ezra,” *JSJ* 13: 56–74, and there is a good deal further written on this subject. Hindy Najman (2012), “How to Make Sense of Pseudonymous Attribution: The Cases of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch,” in Matthias Henze (ed.), *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI, & Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans), 308–336, also makes perceptive remarks about relations between scribalism and prophecy.

secrecy, whereby “the attachment of secrecy to the scribal craft was an ideologically motivated move—it was part of their divine secret knowledge mythmaking strategy—intended to buttress the social position of a very select group of individuals and the authority of their knowledge.”¹⁵ In another attempt to clarify the secret aspect of knowledge in the Second Temple period, Seth Sanders relates such secrecy to the adoption of esoteric traditions of scientific character, which he sees as replacing the “adaptation of law” that is seen in the Pentateuch.¹⁶

15. Thomas (2009), 57. The secret character of some classes of learning in ancient Mesopotamia is well known. Indeed, Alan Lenzi (2008), *Secrecy and the Gods; Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel* (State Archives of Assyria Studies, 19; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project), makes a very interesting analysis highlighting the relationship of secrecy with the knowledge stemming from the Divine Council and the connection of this in turn with writing and scribal specialists. He has set up his categories based on textual usage; his conceptual structure is intriguing, particularly concerning the dynamics of the two cultures, Mesopotamia and ancient Israel, their similarities and differences. He remarks on authority (19); knowledge in Mesopotamia constructed in various corpora with their experts and all going back to the divine realm (67, 140, 149); on revelation in the Bible construed as secret, *ex definitione* (222 and that whole section). His discussion of נס is intriguing, particularly (though he does not go into it) in connection with the Scrolls and their usage of this word (see pp. 238–256). See also Michael E. Stone (1978), “The Book of Enoch and Judaism in the Third Century B.C.E.,” *CBQ*, 40: 479–492, on Mesopotamian elements in early Second Temple Judaism.

16. Seth L. Sanders (2017 forthcoming), “Beyond Borrowing: Aramaic Scribal Culture and the Creativity of Second Temple Judaism,” Chapter 5 in *From Adapa to Enoch: Scribal Culture and Religious Vision in Judea and Babylonia* (TSAJ, 167; Mohr Siebeck), 158: “What takes its [i.e. adaptation of Mesopotamian law MES] place are secret genres of knowledge. These are the esoteric, scholastic genres of science which appear in Aramaic texts dating to around the 3rd century BCE.” On the esoteric character of astronomy compare Annette Yoshiko Reed (2007), especially pp. 469–470, and Tamsyn Barton (1994). The possible conduits of Mesopotamian knowledge to the Jews are discussed by Mladen Popović (2014), “Networks of Scholars: The Transmission of Astronomical and Astrological Learning between Babylonians, Greeks and Jews,” in Jonathan Ben-Dov and Seth L. Sanders (eds.), *Ancient Jewish Sciences and the History of Knowledge in Second Temple Literature* (New York: New York University Press & Institute for the Study of the Ancient World), 153–193.

Focusing on the term “mysteries” and knowledge, Samuel Thomas rightly talks of good and evil mysteries and the role of knowledge thereof.¹⁷ He adds that “these new sapiential pursuits were also concerned with the identification of correspondences between heavenly and earthly realities. . . . A corollary of this development was a fundamental shift in the epistemological basis for knowledge, a reorientation toward divine revelation as a—perhaps as the—cornerstone of legitimate wisdom.”¹⁸

3.2 ORAL OR WRITTEN

Josephus stresses transmission of written documents, when he says explicitly that the Essene initiates swear not to reveal “books belonging to their sect (αἰρέσις)” (*BJ* 2:142). Florentina Badalanova Geller contrasts oral esoteric teaching with written school learning¹⁹: “This distinction was also associated with orality and learning, in that the

17. Thomas (2009), 127–186.

18. Thomas (2009), 73, and see further 105–106. On p. 120 he writes about 4Q545 4:15–17, which passage relates “mysteries” to Levi’s descendants. He also observes that the *Aramaic Levi Document* is in Aramaic, as are the Amram texts.

19. Of course, the distinction between oral and written transmission of teachings in ancient Israel is a much-discussed matter, and here we cannot even broach the enormous scholarly literature on it. However, this is just one aspect of an extremely complex subject, going back diachronically to ancient Israel and extending laterally in contemporary societies. Naturally, work on the written tradition of ancient Israel has been extensive. A simple sequence of oral followed by written, with which many of us used to operate, has to be modified. See Hindy Najman (2003), *Seconding Sinai—The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (JSJSup, 77; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill); Carr (2005); and also Karl van der Toorn (2007), *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA, & London: Harvard University Press). Orality and literacy in the Greco-Roman world are discussed by Guy G. Stroumsa (2005), 27–29, 35–39, and 149. Badalanova Geller’s remark highlights teaching procedures. See also John C. Reeves (1996), *Heralds of That Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 41; Leiden, The Netherlands, New York, & Cologne: Brill), 33, on scribalism and its attribution of writing to ancestral figures.

wisdom of a scholar or noted teacher was only allowed to be transmitted through Socratic dialogue or teaching but not written down.”²⁰ Her contrast of oral esoteric teaching with written school learning needs refining, for orality of a teacher of secret learning, though apparently quite different from learned scribal school tradition, might be comparable with a written document transmitting the same secret learning. Moreover, if Sanders’s and Lenzi’s suggestions about Mesopotamian science and scribal teachings are soundly based, then Mesopotamian secrecy also shrouded aspects of school learning.

Some of the most striking instances of orality connected with Jewish esoteric traditions occur in the Mishnah and Talmud to *Hagiga* 2:1, in which instruction in cosmogonic and mystical lore is achieved through discourse and the number of students is limited.²¹ In more general terms, in the rabbinic tradition schools, teaching was transmitted orally (“the Oral Torah”) and not written down or, if it was written, the oral form was primary.²² A simple sequence of oral followed by written, with which many of us used to operate, may have to be modified.

Remarkably, the known Jewish tradition of the Second Temple period stressed written books that purportedly recorded ancient aural or

20. Conference statement, Dec. 12, 2010 (Berlin). This problem, as well as the Greek suspicion of written texts, is discussed by Tamsyn Barton (1994), 134–136, and by Stroumsa (2005). Real cultural differences stand behind these differing approaches. See Jan Bremmer’s remarks discussed in Chapter 2, note 64, which complement our discussion here. It is interesting to compare with this John Reeves’s attributing the growth in the importance of written records to developments stimulated by writing in the “bureaucratically obsessed Achaemenid empire,” Reeves (1996), 31–34. The quotation is from p. 31.

21. See Ithamar Gruenwald (2014), 111–116; Reed (2007), 477–479. Daniel Merkur describes the hiddenness, orality, and the cryptic language of Inuit shamanistic initiation: Daniel Merkur (1992), *Becoming Half Hidden: Shamanism and Initiation among the Inuit* (New York and London: Garland).

22. Much has been written on literacy in antiquity. As it bears on the Essenes and on Greco-Roman voluntary associations, see Albert I. Baumgarten (1998), “Graeco-Roman Voluntary Associations and Ancient Jewish Sects,” in Martin Goodman (ed.), *Jews in the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press), 93–111, especially 107–109.

visionary revelation.²³ These ancient revelations were claimed to have been communicated by otherworldly sources in primordial times and to have been recorded and transmitted down the generations as written documents. Although these revelatory books claimed ancient origin, their existence is in fact not evidenced in the surviving earlier writings.²⁴ That makes both their presentation as pseudepigraphic—their attribution to an ancient revealer—and the presence of a narrative explaining their transmission crucial to their plausibility.²⁵ Some, such as D.S. Russell, have

23. Charlotte Hempel (2013), *The Qumran Rule Texts in Context* (TSAJ, 154; Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck), 235, remarks that “[a]s far as Daniel is concerned, Philip Davies has described the situation very well when he notes, ‘Daniel, then, is a book in which every thing significant is done by writing.’” Thus we see in 2 *Apocalypses of Baruch* 4:3–5 a tradition of revelation to Adam, Abraham, and Moses. These three biblical individuals are, intriguingly, those whom 4 *Ezra* describes as having received secret revelations. See Chapter 4, §4.3. Guy G. Stroumsa (2015a), *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford Studies in the Abrahamic Religions; Oxford: Oxford University Press), 25–26, remarks acutely on “scripturalism” and attitudes to sacred books. The same point is salient in John Reeves’s words on “Scriptures and Scripturalism,” where the attitudes he highlights contrast strikingly with the much earlier views that were suspicious of writtenness: See note 20 in this chapter; see also John C. Reeves (2011), “Manichaeans as *Ahl al-Kitāb*: A Study in Manichaean Scripturalism,” in Armin Lange et al. (eds.), *Light Against Darkness: Dualism in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and the Contemporary World* (Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements, 2; Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 249–265, especially 249–256. Even more recently, see Guy G. Stroumsa (2015b), especially pages 7–11, on early Christian attitudes to books and reading and the function of scriptures as a sociological marker.

24. There are a number of books mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, such as the “Book of Jashar” (Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18), the “Book of the Wars of the Lord” (Numbers 21:14), and various royal chronicles (1 Kings 11:14, etc.) of which we have no textual remains. It is common among Bible commentators and scholars to assume that those books were lost sometime during the Babylonian Exile. See for a medieval example Abraham ibn Ezra’s commentary on Numbers 21:14. However, some experts doubt that all the cited books, or even some of them, ever really existed.

25. Pseudepigraphy is a feature not only of secret teaching and apocalypses but of other genres as well, such as Testaments. See, among other studies, recent writing by Hindy Najman, such as (2010), “How Should We Contextualise the Pseudepigrapha? Imitation and Emulation in 4 *Ezra*,” *Past Renewals, Interpretative*

suggested that apocalyptic authors saw themselves as standing in a line of tradition stretching back to Enoch, Moses, or the like, and that they could “rightly regard themselves . . . simply as inheritors and interpreters of what, under divine inspiration, they had already received.”²⁶ John Collins talks of pseudepigraphy’s function as giving authority to the apocalyptic work and enhancing a sense of determinism: “In view of the extent of the phenomenon, we must assume that the authors of this literature were conscious of its conventional character.”²⁷ Then the question arises whether

Authority, Renewed Revelation and the Quest for Perfection in Jewish Antiquity (JSJSup, 53; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 235–242, and her interesting paper, Najman (2012). Benjamin Wright has taken up Najman’s idea of emulation, to read Ben Sira’s presentation of the ideal sage, saying, “Although the sage’s inspiration is not revelation in an identical sense that we encounter revelation in Jubilees, 1 Enoch or 4 Ezra, Ben Sira’s sage does claim to have direct access to a source of wisdom given by God that comes from God’s inspiration,” (p. 181). See Benjamin G. Wright III (2008), “Ben Sira on the Sage as Exemplar,” in *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, The Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint* (JSJSup, 131; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 165–182, especially 181–182. This concept may be in the background of the freighted uses of wisdom terminology we have noted: See Chapter 7, §7.2, note 7. On pseudepigraphy in the classical world, see Wolfgang Speyer (1971), *Die Literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum. Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung* (Munich: Ch. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung) and idem. (1970), *Bucherrunde in der Glaubenswerbung der Antike* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht). There is an extensive bibliography on this issue: See further Stone (2003b, 2006a); Russell (1964). Aland proposed a quite different approach to pseudepigraphy in the first two centuries of Christian literature, which contrasts with the previous approach. This, of course, is partly conditioned by the difference in circumstances of the early Christian communities, but I think that any discussion of early Christian pseudepigraphy cannot avoid taking account of the contemporary and immediate precedents in Jewish and Hellenistic pseudepigraphy. See Kurt Aland (1961), “The Problem of Anonymity and Pseudonymity in Christian Literature of the First Two Centuries,” *JTS* (NS) 12: 39–49, for an attempt at a general theory of pseudonymity in Christian literature of the first two centuries. He treats it as an inner-Christian issue and does not consider the non-Christian occurrence of this phenomenon.

26. D. S. Russell (1964), 133. See also Najman (2012), who discusses precisely this issue.

27. John J. Collins (1984), *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad), 30–31. As indicated in note 25 in this chapter, the matter is very complex.

the religious experiences described in the apocalypses originate in religious experiences of the authors, or experiences that were current in the author's circles, or are they part of the literary device of pseudepigraphy? Here we have touched on a disputed issue: The connection between pseudepigraphy and religious experience is very complex, and the relationship between the two affects the epistemology assumed to be current in the apocalypses.

Of course we may ask whether and by which criteria a distinct border can be drawn between a literary strategy and a direct or indirect recollection of some actual experiential happening.²⁸ The establishment of this border depends on the view taken of pseudepigraphy, and it should be borne in mind that neither of these two options is exclusive of the other.²⁹ It seems that either option assumes a social entity transmitting its particular teaching and viewpoint.

28. My own views are set out in two articles: Michael E. Stone (2003b), and Michael E. Stone (2006a), "Pseudepigraphy Reconsidered," *RRJ* 9: 1–15. Both Najman (2010) and (2012) and Wright (2008) have further nuanced the issue of pseudepigraphy.

29. See Russell (1964), 104–139, especially 127–137. See further Stone (2006a), 1–15, and Stone (2011), 90–121. Compare Stone (2003b), 167–180 and earlier, Michael E. Stone (1974), "Apocalyptic—Vision or Hallucination?," *Milla wa-Milla* 14: 47–56. We have, moreover, discussed pseudepigraphy as more than an authority-enhancing strategy. This opposition is clearly drawn by Martha Himmelfarb (1993), *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press), vii and 95–114.

CHAPTER 4

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SECRECY

To set this investigation into its contemporary context, we must bear in mind that in the Hellenistic age, like Judaism, Greek religions underwent deep changes and actively developed diverse types of religious expression.¹ In this lively period of great religious fecundity, profound philosophical styles of religion existed alongside magic,² and mystery cults alongside astrology,³ in addition to the public civic and imperial cults.

1. Two classic works describing this religious development are Eric Robertson Dodds (1951), *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Sather Classical Lectures; Berkeley: University of California Press) and André Jean Festugière (1954), *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* (Sather Classical Lectures; Berkeley: University of California Press). Many more references could be given: For a somewhat later period see Peter Brown (1971), *The World of Late Antiquity* (History of European Civilization Library; London: Thames and Hudson). A classic work on the Hellenistic–Roman mix is Franz Cumont (1956), *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (New York: Dover). Although the English translation of this book is dated to 1956, the French original was published in 1909. A recent review of religion in the Hellenistic and Roman periods may be found in M.R. Salzman and William Adler (2013), *The Cambridge History of Religions in the Ancient World*, Volume 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

2. Of course, this is a modern, theologically determined contrast. In antiquity, the border between religion and magic was no clearer than it actually is today, despite the theologians. See Chapter 2, §2.1, note 38.

3. On the mysteries, see the interesting and balanced study by Walter Burkert (1987). Also useful is the article by Meyer (1992), who additionally explores their relationship to Christianity.

4.1 MYSTERIES AND SECRECY IN HELLENISTIC–ROMAN SOCIETY

There were religions and cults in the Greco–Roman world whose teachings were secret and revealed only to initiates. These “mystery cults” were widespread, and modern scholars of Greco–Roman antiquity tend to connect religious secrets with them above all.⁴ The mysteries were typically said to have promised their adherents illumination or rewards in this world or after death. This reward was to be gained by a process of gradual revelation of secrets corresponding to stages of initiation and concluding with a teaching or demonstration of inner, most sacred mysteries.⁵

Of course, things were not as simple as the preceding summary statement suggests. Nonetheless, Jan Bremmer’s observation that modern descriptions of the Greek mysteries “usually agree that important characteristics shared by all these cults are secrecy and an emotionally impressive initiatory ritual” is just.⁶ His is a quite different focus from the description of the mysteries in terms of salvation, which was common during the twentieth century.⁷ Regardless of this difference,

4. These are not the only loci of secrecy, of course, and different contemporary social and geographical contexts nurtured secrecy and secret knowledge. This included, for example, sacerdotal teaching or astronomy and other sciences (see Chapter 3, §3.1, note 16) or other teachings. Some of these, perhaps many, may remain unknown to us.

5. On the role and character of mystery teachings and their secrecy, see Burkert (1987), 8–9, 31, 50, and 74. He discusses their transmission [παράδοσις] on pp. 69–70. Jan Bremmer’s cautions about oversimplified general characterizations of mystery cults should be borne in mind: See Jan N. Bremmer (2014), XI.

6. He also enumerates other shared features such as their “voluntary character, nocturnal performance, preliminary purification, the obligation to pay for participation, rewards promised for this life and that of the next.” See Jan N. Bremmer (2014), XII.

7. This is not the place to discuss in detail the view of the mysteries as guarantors of immortality, which function was assigned to them primarily by scholars of the “History of Religions School” (Richard Reitzenstein, Franz Cumont, and other luminaries) who were seeking analogies to Christian views of salvation. Observe how carefully Marvin Meyer formulates his opinion: “in spite of their differences, the mystery religions warrant being discussed together because they all represent a particular form of religion. Commonly originating in ancient tribal

such cultic groups may properly be described as “esoteric” or “secret.” The oldest and most famous were the Eleusinian mysteries. Despite the centuries-long duration of this cult and the many thousands initiated into it,⁸ its inmost secret revelation is unknown to this day. It seems that it was a seeing [*epopteia*] of sacred objects or of some other sort of emotionally impressive ritual rather than the revelation of text(s), but beyond it, nothing is known.⁹

A number of mystery cults were devoted to Hellenized forms of Oriental gods, such as Mithras, who originated as Mithra, an Iranian deity associated with contracts and social structures, or the Egyptian goddess Isis.¹⁰ In what follows, I discuss the mysteries of Mithras and those of Isis. A number of other mysteries also existed, and the evidence for them does not contradict our conclusions. The Mithras and Isis cults were widespread, and as a result we know some details about them despite their secrecy. However, much remains unknown precisely because of the practice of secrecy, and, naturally, some information may just have perished in the course of transmission during the centuries.¹¹

and even fertility rituals, these religions emphasized salvation for individuals who decided, through personal choice, to be initiated into the mysteries”: See Meyer (1992), 4.941–945. There is a clear summary article, “Eleusinian Mysteries,” in *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica, 2016. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/184459/Eleusinian-Mysteries>>, and see “Mysteria,” in *Brill’s New Pauly* (online) and bibliography there.

8. See further Jan N. Bremmer (2012), “Initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries: A ‘Thin’ Description,” in Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (eds.), *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 76; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 375–397. See further Bremmer (2014).

9. Bremmer (2012), 375–397. On pp. 384–386, despite adducing abundant allusions in ancient sources, he is forced to take refuge in the realm of surmise as to the nature of what was seen or done in the admission into the highest grade, the *epopteia*. This innermost mystery was apparently related to Demeter and revealed in stages to the initiate.

10. The spread into the Greco–Roman world of cults of deities originating in the “East,” i.e., in the area approximating to the modern Middle East and West Asia, was prominent. The classic work on this topic is Cumont (1909, tr. 1956), but more recent studies abound. For example consult Dodds (1951), Festugière (1954), Brown (1971), and Saltzman and Adler (2013).

11. An overall survey of Greek mysteries may be found in Sarah Iles Johnston (2007).

The mystery cult of Mithras was a favorite of Roman soldiers and very popular in the Empire in the time before Constantine.¹² The nocturnal *taurobolion* [slaughter of a bull] of the Mithraic cult was renowned, and the names of grades of initiates into Mithraism are preserved in inscriptions. Yet the content and details of the innermost ceremonial of this cult are little known, despite Mithraism's wide spread in the first centuries CE. Literary sources directly deriving from Mithraism are very sparse, but a fragmentary papyrus containing a copy of part of a Mithraic initiation ritual did survive in Greek. It contains part of the procedure for administering an oath of secrecy and is dated to not earlier than the third century CE.¹³

The archaeological finds of Mithraea (temples, often caves, of the cult of Mithra), outsider descriptions in ancient literary sources, inscriptions, and figured plaques combine to provide the main evidence we have for Mithraic ideas and belief.¹⁴ Indeed, bas-relief plaques, of which a number have been excavated, show Mithraic iconography, from which scholars are able to infer some of the notional content of Mithraism. Despite this information, the detail and form of initiation into the highest grade of the cult remain unknown.

A glimpse of the nature of initiation into the highest grade of the Mithraic cult may perhaps be gained through its influence on the final fourth part of the Armenian oral epic, *The Epic of Sasun*, which deals with "little Mher" = Mithra, who is imprisoned in rock until the end

12. Burkert (1987), 42, 46–47, *et passim* deals with Mithraism. Likewise, he discusses the other mysteries, such as those of Isis, Eleusis, Dionysius, etc. I forbear giving specific page references, for these subjects run throughout Burkert's book.

13. See Franz Cumont (1933), "Un Fragment de rituel d'initiation aux mystères," *HTR* 26: 151–160. It contains part of the procedure for administering an oath of secrecy. I am indebted to Prof. James Russell who drew my attention to this document and who shared his deep knowledge of matters Mithraic with me.

14. The literary sources are sparse. In general see Jonas Bjørnebye (2012), "Secrecy and Initiation in the Mithraic Communities of Fourth Century Rome," in Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (eds.), *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 76; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 351–374, and further Roger Beck (2006), *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press).

of times.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the outsider literary sources offer little help. Without the archaeological discovery of inscriptions and of the bas-relief Mithras plaques,¹⁶ which yield some (far from complete) insider information, Mithraic teachings and practice would remain virtually impenetrable.¹⁷ The fragmentary papyrus preserved a copy of the oral initiation ritual for the fourth grade of initiation, but that is all. In fact, the Mithraic teachings propounded by scholars are inferred from the sources just mentioned.¹⁸ Despite the diversity of sources, except apparently the papyrus relating to the fourth grade of initiation, the most significant events of the initiation are still hidden from us. The same obscurity surrounds the central mystery as it is described in ancient literary documents, including the heresiologists. The only possible source is the Armenian oral epic, as already mentioned and its yield is meager.

An instruction book for an adept who wishes to ascend and encounter a deity is embedded in a large papyrus, known as the Great Paris Magical papyrus (PGM IV.475–834). In 1903, Albrecht Dietrich

15. James R. Russell (2014), “The Epic of Sasun: Armenian Apocalypse,” in Kevork Bardakjian and Sergio La Porta (eds.), *The Armenian Apocalyptic Tradition: A Comparative Perspective* (SVTP, 25; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 41–77. Particularly relevant to our remarks are pp. 43–47 and 56–57.

16. In general, see Jonas Bjørnebye (2012).

17. Mithraea, i.e., Mithraic shrines, have been found all over the Roman world, including Caesarea Maritima on the coast of Israel. See, in general, John Roberts (ed.) (2007), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 479–480, and in greater detail with bibliography, Han J.W. Drijvers and A.F. de Jong (1999), “Mithras,” in Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Piet van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden, The Netherlands, New York, & Cologne: Brill), 578–581.

18. See Jonas Bjørnebye (2012), 351–374. I should remark that by no means do I doubt or discount the significance of these scholarly inferential conclusions. They are quite remarkable. My point is that they are primarily based on outsider and archaeological evidence. We possess almost no written Mithraic documents, and the inmost secrets of Mithraism remain secret. The situation with the Isis cult is the same, for our best source is the allegorical story that Apuleius relates in his *Golden Ass*, and, being an allegory, it is far from explicit. Bremmer (2014), 115–125, discusses the initiation described by Apuleius.

isolated this document from the surrounding material. He thought that it was of Mithraic origin and so he dubbed it “A Mithras Liturgy.”¹⁹ However, subsequently Dieterich’s opinion was challenged, and some other scholars maintained that in fact the document has nothing to do with the Mithraic mysteries.²⁰ Despite this, in recent discussions its possible Mithraic connections have again been explored.²¹ This ascent liturgy includes prominent magical elements transmitted to the practitioner. The knowledge is called “mystery,” and the document emphasizes secrecy and silence.²² Following Betz, I regard the text as certainly

19. Albrecht Dieterich (1923), *Ein Mithras Liturgie* ([Leipzig] Darmstadt: [Teubner] Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft). This identification has been disputed, and the controversy is documented by Hans Dieter Betz in his book (2003), *The “Mithras Liturgy”* (STAC, 18; Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck) who presents the text, together with translation, full discussion, and commentary.

20. Betz (2003), 1–5, 19–25, gives a history of scholarship, also on this matter of identification. Christian H. Bull (2015) thinks that the “Mithras-Liturgy . . . was in fact probably affiliated with Hermetism,” p. 122.

21. See Betz (2003), 32–38, who highlights its connections with the Hermetic literature and its Egyptian religious milieu (p. 37). The Mithras Liturgy bears a certain similarity to the first-millennium CE Hebrew magical work *Sefer Ha-Razim*: see Mordechai Margalioth (1966), *Sefer Ha-Razim* (Jerusalem: American Academy of Jewish Research), Michael A. Morgan (trans.) (1983), *Sepher HaRazim: The Book of Mysteries*, (SBLTT 25; PS, 11; Chico, CA: Scholars Press), and Bill Rebiger and Peter Schäfer (eds.) (2009), *Sefer ha-Razim I und II. Das Buch der Geheimnisse*, Volume 1 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck).

22. Marvin Meyer claims that the Mithras Liturgy is indeed Mithraic: Marvin Meyer (2012), “The ‘Mithras Liturgy’ as Mystery and Magic,” in Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (eds.), *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 76; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 447–464, especially p. 448. On p. 461 he argues that the silence enjoined is not secretive but instructive, and on p. 462 σιγή [silence] is addressed as “symbol of the living, incorruptible god.” See further Kimberly B. Stratton (2000), “The Mithras Liturgy and *Sefer Ha-Razim*,” in Richard Valantasis (ed.), *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice* (Princeton Readings in Religion; Princeton, NJ, & Oxford: Princeton University Press), 303–315. Note the primordial silence into which the divine creative word was spoken in 4 Ezra 7:30; LAB 28:4, 60:2–3; and 2ApBar 3:7. Ithamar Gruenwald (2014), 255–263, discusses *Sefer Ha-Razim* from the perspective of the Merkabah literature. See further Betz (2003), Margalioth (1966), Morgan (1983), and Rebiger and Schäfer (2009).

an ascent vision with connections to the mystery cults, but not necessarily to the Mithraic mysteries.²³

We have a little, not quite secure, piece of information about initiation into the Isis mystery from the second-century CE author Apuleius. He himself seems to have been initiated into the Isis mystery, and he included an allegory of this initiation in his novel called the *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass*.²⁴ In addition, some real knowledge of the Isis cult survives in Plutarch's treatise *De Iside et Osiride*,²⁵ and also quite a number of inscriptions relating to it have been uncovered. A paean of praise to Isis, called an areteology, is recorded in a number of partly preserved inscriptional copies from the third century BCE on. It provides considerable information about how the goddess was regarded.²⁶ Once more, except perhaps for what can be learnt from Lucius's allegory, there is no sound insider information about what transpired at the highest level of initiation.²⁷ The situation with the Isis cult in this respect is the same as for Mithraism. Its central mystery is another well-kept secret. The evidence presented in this paragraph strengthens our observation that the ancients kept such secrets faithfully.

As will become evident, the groups discussed in this study predominantly exhibit a basically tripartite social structure: the seer or founder, an inner group of disciples, and an outer group of adherents.

23. Betz (2003), 33.

24. Apuleius also wrote on Platonic philosophy, and it is not completely certain that he was actually initiated into the mysteries of Isis. The *Metamorphoses* had a great literary influence, and it is clear that his narrative draws on many sources. See briefly Roberts (2007), 54–55. See also Burkert (1987), *passim*.

25. See for translation and commentary J. Gwyn Griffiths (ed.) (1970), *Plutarch's de Iside et Osiride*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press).

26. See the helpful publication of Gail Corrington Streete (2000), "An Isis Aretalogy from Kyme in Asia Minor, First Century B.C.E.," in Richard Valantasis (ed.), *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice* (Princeton Readings in Religion; Princeton, NJ, & Oxford: Princeton University Press), 369–383. Frederick C. Grant (1953), *Hellenistic Religions* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill), 131–133, includes an earlier translation of the "Praises of Isis" with brief introduction.

27. Bremmer (2014), 115–125, discusses the initiation described in Apuleius in his *Golden Ass*. See also §4.1, note 24.

Manichaeism is a fine example of that, though Mani's missionary attitude to his teachings determined their public character. Manichaeism is not an esoteric religion, but it is discussed briefly here because its social structure is like that just outlined, and its attitude to its core documents contrasts interestingly to that of the groups just discussed.²⁸ This religion, founded in the third century CE by Mani, a prophetic figure who grew up in Mesopotamia as a member of a Jewish-Christian baptizing sect called the Elchasaites, became widespread during the first millennium CE. In the Manichean church there were ranked classes of adherents but no secret teaching. Instead of secrecy, Manichaeism nurtured a missionary desire to spread Mani's teachings. As a result of this activity, Manichaeism spread southward from Western Asia to Syria and Egypt, and as far east as China, and it remained a living religion down to the Middle Ages.

Direct knowledge of Manichean teachings is available through the rich archaeological discoveries of Manichaean texts in various languages, including certain of Mani's own writings. Some first-generation

28. I. Gruenwald discusses the connection of practice between what is described in the Cologne Mani codex and the first-millennium Jewish mystical Hekhalot literature. The channels of transmission between these two movements remain unknown, but doubtless Mesopotamia was involved. See Ithamar Gruenwald (1983), "Manichaeism and Judaism in Light of the Cologne Mani Codex," *ZPE* 50: 29–45, and see further Johannes van Oort (2001), "Jewish Elements in the Cologne Mani Codex," *Naples Conference 2001* (typescript). The tripartite division of the Manichean church is well known. A like division obtained in the medieval European dualist movement of the Cathars. Despite its striking similarities with Manichaeism and the Bulgarian dualistic heretics, the Bogomils, many experts remain unconvinced that the origin of the Cathars should be sought among the Bogomils. The Eastern connection of the Cathars was urged anew, with some reservations, by R. van den Broek (1998), "The Cathars: Medieval Gnostics?," in R. van den Broek and Wouter Hanegraaff (eds.), *Gnosis and Hermeticism From Antiquity to Modern Times* (SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions; Albany, NY: SUNY), 87–108. On a lighter note, see the lively microhistory by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (1979), *Montailou: The Promised Land of Error* (New York & Toronto: Vintage Books). Despite the eastern connection, the derivation of the Cathars and Bogomils from Manichaeism is doubted by van den Broek (1998), 93–94. The Valentinian communities also cultivated a tripartite division of their society; see Dylan M. Burns (2014), 25.

biographical material is contained in the Cologne Mani Codex in Greek, which gives many reliable personal details of the founder.²⁹ This abundance of insider documentation is an outcome of the Manichaean attitudes to their teachings, which they disseminated vigorously. This situation is the reverse of what we observed in the Hellenistic–Roman mystery cults.

In addition, there are quite numerous outsider testimonies to Manichaeism, particularly in the writings of Christian heresiologists who describe it in the course of polemical attacks on it.³⁰ A further source of knowledge about the Manicheans is one that does not exist for most secret groups—polemical attacks on the religion by a former member of the group. Thus we learn of some Manichaean teachings through the writings of Augustine, who was a Manichean in his youth and subsequently converted to Christianity.³¹ The abundance of

29. In general on this, see Johannes van Oort (2003), *Mani, Manichaeism & Augustine: The Rediscovery of Manichaeism & Its Influence on Western Christianity*, fifth ed., revised and expanded (Tbilisi, Georgia: Georgian Academy of Sciences); Johannes Van Oort (2013), “Augustine and Manichaean Christianity: A Testimony to a Paradigm Shift in Augustinian Studies?,” in Johannes Van Oort and Einar Thomassen (eds.), *Augustine and Manichaean Christianity* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 83; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), ix–xv. See also Johannes Van Oort (1998), “Manichaeism: Its Sources and Influences on Western Christianity,” in R. van den Broek and Wouter Hanegraaff (eds.), *Gnosis and Hermeticism From Antiquity to Modern Times* (SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions; Albany, NY: SUNY), 37–51. The Cologne Mani Codex is very conveniently accessible in Greek with an English translation in Ron Cameron and Arthur J. Dewey (1979), *The Cologne Mani Codex* (P. Colon. inv. nr. 4780) “Concerning the Origin of his Body” (SBLTT, 15, Early Christian Literature Series, 3; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press). For a compact survey of the sources for Manichaeism, see Michel Tardieu (2008), *Manichaeism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 31–56. A collection of five interesting studies is Samuel N.C. Lieu (1994), *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World; Leiden, The Netherlands, New York, & Cologne: Brill).

30. Of course, such polemical writings must be studied carefully and their statements evaluated in light of their purpose.

31. Josephus claimed that he had experience of the Essenes and lived three years imitating a most rigorous ascetic in the desert (*Life*, 10–12). So we might think that his passages on the Essenes were analogous to those of Augustine on the Manicheans. Yet, unlike, the renegade Manichee Augustine, Josephus shows no

Manichean insider information contrasts tellingly with the paucity of such evidence for the mystery cults. Manicheans were keen to spread their teaching; adherents of mystery cults, in contrast, sought to keep their secrets hidden.

Thus the preceding examples show that in the Hellenistic–Roman period people did keep innermost mysteries secret and we only know them, if we do, through the uncovering of archaeological evidence or occasionally from the writings of renegade members of these closed, secret societies.³² Because this is the case, then, despite a lack of direct evidence, it is more than just possible that in the Second Temple period further secret groups existed within Judaism in addition to the Essenes and the Therapeutae.³³

4.2 SECRET SOCIETIES AND ANCIENT JUDAISM

We may take it as proven, in light of the discussion in §4.1, that the ancients did keep secrets.³⁴ Consequently, only occasionally can we

familiarity with the concepts and terminology specific to the Qumran covenanters' documents. So he does not write as a former Essene. In fact, it seems unlikely that he ever lived as an Essene: See Morton Smith (1958), 277–278.

32. We do not deal here with the issues of secrecy in the various groups and documents that are called “gnostic.” In addition to the work of Ismo Dunderberg (2008), *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press), Karen L. King makes many intriguing observations in her paper (2012) “Mystery and Secrecy in the Secret Revelation of John,” in Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (eds.), *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 76; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 61–85. Far from the least interesting are her remarks on p. 61 concerning *Secret Revelation of John's* statements about its own secret transmission, and also her discussion of concealment and revelation on p. 66.

33. On the name “Therapeutae,” see §4.3, note 100.

34. One wonders whether the distinction between “religious” and “scholastic” secrecy, drawn by Dunderberg in his work on Valentinus, really holds: See Dunderberg (2008), 193–194 and compare 149–151. The existence in the Valentinian community of two grades distinguished by levels of knowledge seems

gain insider access to the secret dimensions of ancient esoteric groups or cults through renegades; more often we glimpse these groups through the chance of archaeological discovery of manuscripts, inscriptions, cult sites, or the like. The secret groups in the Hellenistic–Roman world that were discussed in the preceding section were major religious movements, and they left considerable material remains behind. These remains, the archaeological record including excavated written documents and inscriptions, provide information about them. Now, we pose analogous questions to Judaism in the same period.

I have reviewed some of the social dynamics by which secret societies functioned. I have also shown the existence of such esoteric groups in the Greco–Roman world and have formed a general idea of the types of evidence that have survived as witnesses to the existence of such non-Jewish secret societies. Now I present the two Jewish groups widely known to have nurtured esoteric learning and practice during the Second Temple period and examine them from the perspectives previously presented. These two ancient Jewish secret societies are the Essenes and the Therapeutae. Their existence and public customs were known, but their inner teaching and practice remained concealed within their own boundaries.

clear: See Dunderberg (2008), 149–151. A similar analysis is supported by Jean-Daniel Dubois and Flavia Ruani (2012), “Interprétation d’une formule barbare chez les gnostiques valentiniens d’après le *contre les hérésies* d’Irénée, I, 21,3,” in Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (eds.), *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 76; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 39–59, especially p. 42. Guy Stroumsa discusses such twofold groupings in early Christianity and, *mutatis mutandis*, in Hellenistic philosophical schools (see Stroumsa [2005], Chapters 1–2). Contrast the words of L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte (2012), “Paul, Baptism and Religious Experience,” in Colleen Shantz and Rodney A. Werline (eds.), *Experientia, Volume 2: Linking Text and Experience* (SBLJL, 35; Atlanta, GA: SBL), 181–204: “. . . to a certain extent, Christianity used the vocabulary of the mystery religions but not their esotericism” (p. 181). See further his remarks on Paul on pp. 186–188. I draw attention in connection with this note to double explanations of parables reported in the Gospels, one to the public and a second one to an inner group of disciples, as is found in Mark 4:10, 32–33.

In the chain of Jewish literature that became normative, there is a centuries-long gap between the end of scriptural writing (meaning the Hebrew Bible) and the inception of Tannaitic compositions. This gap makes it possible to discern the variety of Judaism in the Second Temple period, for many different writings survived in varied streams of tradition as well as physically among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which had a wide variety of contents.³⁵ Can the search for secret societies in the Second Temple period enrich even more the known abundance of types of Judaism flourishing during that age?

In considering this question, we can speculate that if we know of two such secret societies, and we do, there may have been more.³⁶ Did more secret groups and traditions of learning exist than those that the well-known “outsider sources,” such as Josephus, the New Testament, or Philo of Alexandria, mention? In fact, the lack of direct “outsider” evidence does not disprove the existence of secret, esoteric groups. Consequently, other secret societies might have existed in Ancient Judaism than the Essenes and the Therapeutae. The challenge is to see whether it is possible to infer the existence of any secret groups from surviving literary and physical remains. The characteristics of secret societies that we discussed in §4.1 and the sort of evidence we adduced to describe the existence of such social groups in ancient society sharpen this challenge.

35. Michael E. Stone (1980), 49–56, and *idem.* (2011), 1–30. I do not maintain that the whole biblical corpus became normative after about the fourth century BCE. Indeed, this particular collection gained an authoritative position in a gradual process lasting centuries: See Stone (2011), 122–150. Similarly, the discussions of the rabbinic academies did not suddenly become dominant with the finalization of the Mishnah in the early third century. Yet it is striking that no other writings survived from pre-Exilic Israel but the scriptural corpus and relatively little literature is transmitted in the rabbinic tradition originating in the first two centuries CE, beyond the accepted Tannaitic books. In the period between these two corpora we have plentiful literature of many types transmitted in diverse ways by differing social groups.

36. Indeed, the distinction has been drawn between secret secret societies, that is, groups whose very existence is kept secret, and publicly known secret societies, groups whose existence is known but who keep their teaching and practice secret.

4.3 ESSENES AND THERAPEUTAE AS SECRET GROUPS

In Ancient Judaism, the most famous esoteric group is the Essenes, known first from passages in Jewish works in Greek written by Philo, scion of a leading family of the large Jewish community of Alexandria in Egypt, and by Josephus, a priest from Jerusalem and general in the war against the Romans in 68–70 CE who was a generation younger than Philo.³⁷ Philo describes the Essenes in his treatises *Hypothetica* (11.1–18) and *Every Good Man Is Free* (12.75–13.91). Josephus's most detailed description of the Essenes is in the *Jewish War* (2.119–161). He also included a shorter passage concerning this sect in *Jewish Antiquities* (18.18–22).³⁸ The Latin author Pliny the Elder (mid-first century CE) also wrote briefly about the Essenes in his *Natural History* (5.73).³⁹

The description of the Essene sect and their way of life preserved in these Greek and Latin works broadly resembles that which is legislated in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered by the Bedouin and by archaeologists at Qumran on the northwest corner of the Dead Sea in the years since 1947.⁴⁰ The argument has waxed long and strong about

37. All the classical sources are gathered in Alfred Adam (1961), *Antike Berichte über die Essener* (KTVU, 182; Berlin: de Gruyter). See further the convenient summary article of Joan E. Taylor (2010), "The Classical Sources on the Essenes and the Scrolls Communities," in Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 173–199.

38. John J. Collins (2010) considers the likelihood that Philo and Josephus *AJ* 18 drew on a common source. He also thinks that Josephus in *BJ* 2 and Hippolytus in *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.18–28 drew on a common source: *ibid* 133. See further §4.1, note 31.

39. See Olav Hammer and Jan A.M. Snoek (2006), "Essenes, Esoteric Legend about," in Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 340–343. Note also the source material analyzed by Morton Smith (1958) and that presented by Adam (1961). See further Adam (1961) and Taylor (2010). On the passage in Pliny, see Robert A. Kraft (2001), "Pliny on Essenes, Pliny on Jews," *DSD* 8(3): 255–261. His article is richly documented.

40. See the discussion in James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint (2002), *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus and Christianity* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco), 239–254. The

whether divergences and similarities between the practices reported by Philo and Josephus and what we learn from the Qumran rule [*serek*] scrolls prove or disprove the Essene identification of the Qumran community. This dispute might have been at least partly avoided had it been highlighted that divergences may reflect differences between “insider” and “outsider” reports. Regardless, the direct comparison of these sources has shown that as well as striking similarities, there are also certain specific differences.⁴¹ Nonetheless, most scholars today link the Qumran sect⁴² with the Essenes described by Josephus.⁴³

question of Josephus’s actual contact with the Essenes remains open, despite his claims in *Life* 2.10; and see §4.1, note 31.

41. For an example, based on toilet practice, see A. I. Baumgarten (1996), “The Temple Scroll, Toilet Practices, and the Essenes,” *Jewish History*, 10(1): 9–20. Moreover, Baumgarten discusses the comparison of Philo and Josephus with the Scrolls on pp. 9–10 of that article with admirable clarity.

42. The term “sect,” as a translation of αἵρεσις, the Greek word used by Josephus, is problematic, as many have noted. See recently Joan E. Taylor (2011), “The Nazoraeans as a ‘Sect’ in ‘Sectarian’ Judaism? A Reconsideration of the Current View via the Narrative of Acts and the Meaning of Hairesis,” in Sacha Stern (ed.), *Sects and Sectarianism in Jewish History* (IJS Studies in Judaica, 12; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 87–118. The term describes a group that deviates from a generally accepted norm or generally accepted norms. Whether the Jewish groups, or any of them, were sects in this sense is still debated. Naturally, that depends, among other considerations, on whether there was a norm from which to deviate. Anthony J. Saldarini gives a good overview of Jewish sectarianism in the Second Temple period in (2000), “Sectarianism,” in Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2.853–857. See also Albert I. Baumgarten (2007), “Josephus on Ancient Jewish Groups from a Social Science Perspective,” in Shaye J.D. Cohen and Joshua J. Schwartz (eds.), *Studies in Josephus and the Varieties of Ancient Judaism: Louis H. Feldman Jubilee Volume* (Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 1–13, and Chalcraft (2007, 2011), Tremlett (2011), Regev (2007, 2010), in dealing with the sociology of religious sects. The word sect is avoided here for the sake of clarity.

43. Even before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the insightful Louis Ginzberg had posited a similar group on the basis of the “Zadokite Document” = the *Damascus Document* discovered in the Cairo Geniza [CD]: see Louis Ginzberg (1922), “Eine unbekannte jüdische Sekte. Teil 1” (New York: Im Selbstverlage des Verfassers) [no more published].

The general resemblances between the Qumran covenanters and the Essenes presented by the classical sources are noteworthy. There are, however, also differences, not only between those classical sources and the Qumran covenanters as revealed by the Scrolls, but also among various descriptions of and regulations pertaining to the group(s) in the Scrolls themselves. What we have in hand, then, is information transmitted by or derived from varied sources, from diverse locations, times, and social contexts describing religious groups that show a great overall similarity. Scholars have concluded that these diverse sources are describing not a single group but a number of allied groups exhibiting great resemblances. It is therefore unwise to speak of “the Essenes” as if they existed as a single, uniform, and solidly crystallized group, fixed in structure, time, and place. That being said, the Scrolls obviously form the major source of information about the Qumran covenanters, apparently “Essenes,” or, more precisely, a variety of Essenes.⁴⁴ We can approximate a picture of the secret society of the covenanters at Qumran by combining the insider information in the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves with the major outsider descriptions by Philo, Josephus, and some lesser reports found in the writings of various other authors such as Pliny and Hippolytus.⁴⁵

The two main documents casting light on the organization of the covenanters’ group or groups are the *Community Rule* (S) and the *Damascus Document* (D).⁴⁶ The *Yahad* (the term designating the

44. The reference here is to Josephus, *AJ* 18:11, 18:18–22.

45. Adam (1961) conveniently assembled Late Antique sources relating to the Essenes.

46. Discussion of the various text forms of these documents and the history of their transmission may be found in the standard handbooks such as Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (eds.) (2000), *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Oxford University Press) and VanderKam and Flint (2002). There also exist a number of monographic studies of these writings. See, e.g., Charlotte Hempel (2000), *The Damascus Texts* (Companion to the Qumran Scrolls, 1; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press); Sarianna Metso (1997), *The Textual Development of the Qumran Community Rule* (STDJ, 21; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill) and numerous others. The literary growth and relations between the eleven manuscripts of the *Community Rule* from Caves 1 and 4 are studied in Charlotte Hempel (2015) article, “The Long Text of the *Serekh* as Crisis

community in the *Community Rule*) and the ‘*Edah*’ (the term used by the *Damascus Document*), which are the groups for which these two documents legislated, did differ in a number of organizational ways, but they shared more than that in which they differed. The *Damascus Document* describes a presumably older, family-based form of organization that is not the same as that described in the *Community Rule*, whereas the *Community Rule* legislates for a group of nonmarrying Essenes living a communal life. Even within the *Community Rule* we can trace quite notable organizational differences among different passages of legislation.⁴⁷ Column 5 of 1QS, the *Community Rule*,⁴⁸ preserves a passage giving organizational details of a group similar to the ‘*Edah*’ of the *Damascus Document*. This passage is at odds with the dominant structural pattern of the community set forth elsewhere in *The Community Rule*. Indeed, John Collins marshalls very clearly convincing evidence for a variety of Essene groups, evidence derived from the analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves.⁴⁹ Without the evidence of the Scrolls, these various specific groups would have remained unknown. We have learned about them only through the happenstance of the discovery of the manuscripts in Qumran Cave 1 and the subsequent identification of ten more caves at Qumran that contained manuscripts, as well as a number of other caves that showed signs of occupation.

Literature,” RQ 27 (2015), 3–24. I wish to thank Dr. Hempel for making a typescript of this article available to me.

47. See the articles by Charlotte Hempel (2000, 2012, 2013), as well as Adam (1961), Taylor (2010), VanderKam and Flint (2002), Collins (2010), Regev (2007, 2010), Yonder Moynihan Gillihan (2012), *Civic Ideology, Organization, and Law in the Rules Scrolls: A Comparative Study of the Covenanters Sect and Contemporary Voluntary Associations in Political Context* (STDJ, 97; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill).

48. That is, column 5 in the copy of the *Community Rule* found in Cave 1 at Qumran, one of the first scrolls to come to light.

49. Collins (2010), 56–64. Collins surmises that *Yahad* is an “umbrella term, denoting a number of groups of different sizes.” Eyal Regev (2007), *Sectarianism at Qumran: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Religion and Society, 45; Berlin & New York: de Gruyter), 163–196, discusses the differences of the communities implied by these two documents but perhaps pushes his conclusions too far.

My own inclination is to say that (1) there are obviously differences between the outsider reports about a secret group and the details of organization and conduct to be inferred from insider legislation; (2) just as groups bearing the same name described by Philo and Josephus differ from one another in a number of significant ways, so the groups prescribed for by the *Damascus Document* and the *Community Rule* also differ. These divergences might be the outcome of different developmental stages or geographical locations of the group(s) authoring the documents, or they might reflect a plurality of more or less contemporary subgroups. Moreover, we do not know enough about the overall organization of the Essene movement or, for that matter, about their degree of doctrinal and organizational flexibility, to declare that one description is right and another wrong, or that idea A was acceptable to “the Essenes” and not idea B. To summarize, we may say that the Qumran community was an Essene group, and there is evidence that a number of Essene groups existed, distinguished by time, place, ideas, or specific aspects of conduct or by various combinations these factors.⁵⁰ Consequently, the sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls are a crucial, first-hand witness to one or more groups of the Essenes.

Of course, Essenes did not compose all the works found at Qumran. Among the manuscripts were many known writings, both scriptural and apocryphal, that had been transmitted by Christians and Jews over the long centuries. However, the Qumran library did comprise quite a number of works that were unknown or barely known before it was discovered.⁵¹ Certain of these unknown Qumran

50. The arguments for and against identifying the Qumran sectaries with an Essene group are also marshalled clearly in VanderKam and Flint (2002), 239–254, and see further Collins (2010), 56–64 and note 167. On the different social structures clearly implied by the *Damascus Document* and the *Community Rule*, see Eyal Regev (2007), 163–196 and idem. (2010). Regev treats the implications of organizational differences between these two foundational documents. Gillihan (2012) also lays the matter out with admirable clarity on pp. 21–23. A comparable diversity may be detected in the descriptions of the Essenes in Greek and Latin sources, as we have noted: See Taylor (2010).

51. Examples of nonsectarian writings at Qumran that barely survived elsewhere are given by Aryeh Amihay and Daniel A. Machiela (2010), “Traditions of

scrolls share distinctive and largely unparalleled terminology and concepts that modern scholars describe as “sectarian.”⁵² These sectarian features seem to be typical of the Qumran covenanters and allied groups. The other writings, including copies of all the books that became scripture—except for Esther—and previously known apocrypha, together with certain previously unknown works, lack the specific Qumran sectarian terminology. Recent estimates set the sectarian scrolls at about 25% of the Qumran library⁵³ and they seem to be, as we said, the writings of two or more closely allied groups.⁵⁴

the Birth of Noah,” in *Noah and His Book(s)*, Michael E. Stone, Aryeh Amihay and Vered Hillel (eds.) (SBLEJL, 28; Atlanta, GA: SBL), 53–69, and Benjamin G. Wright III (1999), “Qumran Pseudepigrapha and Early Christianity: Is 1 Clement 50:4 a Citation of 4Qpseudo-Ezekiel (4Q385 12)?,” in *Pseudepigraphic Perspectives: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Michael E. Stone and Esther G. Chazon (eds.), (STDJ, 31; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 183–193.

52. Emanuel Tov has even striven to isolate scribal features of certain scrolls that mark them as of Qumranian origin. See his work (2004), *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts found in the Judean Desert* (STDJ, 54; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 261–276, and Appendix I on 277–288.

53. See further on the issue of sectarian scrolls, Carol A. Newsom (1990a), “‘Sectually Explicit’ Literature in Qumran,” in William H. Propp, Baruch Halpern, and David N. Freedman (eds.), *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), 167–187, and see note 54 in this section. On the composition of the library and the percentage of sectarian texts, see Devorah Dimant (2005), “Between Sectarian and non-Sectarian: The Case of the Apocryphon of Joshua,” in Esther G. Chazon, Devorah Dimant, and Ruth A. Clements (eds.), *Reworking the Bible: Apocryphal and Related Texts at Qumran* (STDJ, 58; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 105–134, especially pp. 105–107.

54. This is a subject of considerable controversy. For the categorization of unknown writings, possibly reflecting different types of “Essene” or other Jewish groupings and distinguishing the Essenes writings from others, see Esther G. Chazon (1992), “Is Divrei Ha-Me’orot a Sectarian Prayer?” in Devorah Dimant and Uriel Rappaport (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls. Forty Years of Research* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press), 3–17. The criteria have been refined since 1992, but the distinction persists. Esther G. Chazon now makes the case for a reassessment of the criteria after the publication of the whole corpus of scrolls: See Esther G. Chazon (2011), “Shifting Perspectives on Liturgy At Qumran and in Second Temple Judaism,” in Armin Lange, Emanuel Tov, Matthias Weigold, and Bennie H.

The only sectarian scroll known before the discovery at Qumran was the *Damascus Document*, which turned up among the trove of manuscripts discovered in the storeroom of an ancient synagogue in Cairo, called the Cairo Geniza. This work's connection with the sect is confirmed by the three very fragmentary copies that were identified among the Qumran manuscripts, as well as by shared terminology and ideas. Although it was found in the Cairo Geniza, the *Damascus Document* has left no traces in Jewish literature in Hebrew and Aramaic from the Second Temple period down to the Middle Ages. Had it circulated at all widely, one can presume that some traces of its sectarian language and terminology would have found their way into other Hebrew literature of the first millennium CE. So we are faced with a conundrum: A sectarian document of which we have copies from the Qumran caves also survived in the Cairo Geniza, but it had no ramifications during the thousand years that intervene between the Geniza copy and its Qumran forebears.

Although it sounds like a most convenient *deus ex machina*, I have come to agree with scholars who hold that the *Damascus Document* preserved in the Cairo Geniza may well have been the fruit of a chance find of manuscripts near the Dead Sea. Indeed, we happen to have explicit and quite detailed information about one such find in the Jericho region just north of Qumran in the eighth century CE.⁵⁵ We know of

Reynolds III (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Context: Integrating the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Study of Ancient Texts*, (VTSup, 140/II; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 513–531. Compare this with the earlier statements of Newsom (1990a). See also Devorah Dimant (2009).

55. See Michael E. Stone (2002), "Aramaic Levi in Its Contexts," *JSQ* 9(4): 307–326, especially 315–318, and the bibliography there. However, the Geniza manuscripts of the *Damascus Document* could have derived from a different find at a different time. There is no reason to assume that Patriarch Timothy's find was the only one made during the two millennia that have passed since the deposit of the manuscripts in the caves near Qumran. It is, of course, the only well-documented medieval find. See Oskar Braun (1901), "Der Katholikos Timotheos I und seine Briefe," *Oriens Christianus*, 1: 138–152, and Stone (2011), 191, and notes there. Paul Kahle was one of the first to propose this: Kahle (1951), "The Age of the Scrolls," *VT* 1: 38–48, especially 44–48.

another significant manuscript find in the same region. Earlier, before Origen's compilation of the *Hexapla* in the third century CE, one or two Greek Bible translations, later than and additional to the Old Greek translation called the Septuagint, were discovered in jars near Jericho.⁵⁶ Complementing this ancient discovery, in modern times a late first-century CE scroll of a Greek translation of the Twelve Minor Prophets was found in Cave 8 (the Cave of Horrors) in Naḥal Ḥever, a valley south of Qumran.⁵⁷ This site was not connected with the Qumran sectarians, and, among other things, documents written by Bar Cochba and other finds of the second century CE were discovered there.

Thus there were ancient discoveries of manuscripts in the region around Qumran. Were archaeological finds the only way that Jewish material from the Second Temple period was known in medieval Jewish literature? The academies in which rabbinic literature was created were the chief institutions in which Jewish learning in Hebrew and Aramaic flourished in the centuries after the destruction of the Temple. The surviving major canonical corpora of Jewish learning, both halachic and midrashic, were the products of these academies both in the Land of Israel and in Babylon.

The rabbinic academies were, however, not the only active schools of learning or channels of transmission, as is evident from literary traditions that have survived, such as astrological works, magical and medical texts, liturgy, hymnology, and others.⁵⁸ These traditions

56. See, with citation of Greek and Latin sources, Henry B. Swete (1914), *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 53–55.

57. Emanuel Tov and Robert A. Kraft (eds.) (1995), *The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Nahal Hever (8HevXIIgr)* (The Seiyal Collection I), 2nd ed., (Discoveries in the Judean Desert, 8; Oxford: Clarendon). One wonders who might have deposited the Greek texts in the Naḥal Ḥever caves.

58. See for example (1) in astrological tradition, Reimund Leicht (2006), *Astrologumena Judaica—Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der astrologischen Literatur der Juden* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck); Reimund Leicht (1999), "Qedushah and Prayer to Helios: A New Hebrew Version of an Apocryphal Prayer of Jacob," *JSQ* 6: 140–176; Reimund Leicht (1996), "A Newly Discovered Hebrew Version of the Apocryphal 'Prayer of Manasseh,'" *JSQ* 3(4): 359–373. Observe (2) the magical tradition exemplified by Morgan (1983) and Philip Alexander's introduction and notes of *Sefer HaRazim* in Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and

persisted and often flourished. Recent research has made it increasingly evident that ancient texts from the Second Temple period and somewhat later in the early first millennium CE and written in the Hebrew or Aramaic language, reached the Middle Ages without the channel of their transmission or even their very existence being evident in rabbinic

Martin Goodman (eds.), E. Schürer (1986), *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), 3.1 342–379; also see §4.1, note 21 and §4.2, note 38. Hints of (3) the medical tradition are to be found in Shlomo Pines (1975), “The Oath of Asaph the Physician and Yohanan ben Zabda: Its Relation to the Hippocratic Oath and the *Doctrina duarum viarum* of the *Didache*,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, 9: 223–264 and a substantial representative of the medical tradition is discussed in Elinor Lieber (1984), “Asaf’s Book of Medicines: A Hebrew Encyclopedia of Greek and Jewish Medicine, Possibly Compiled in Byzantium on an Indian Model,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 38: 233–249 and idem. (1991), “An Ongoing Mystery: The So-Called Book of Medicines Attributed to Asaf the Sage,” *Bulletin of Judeo-Greek Studies*, 8: 18–28. Fragments of *Jubilees* have been found in *Sefer Asaf Ha-Rofe*. The (4) hymnic [piyyut] tradition also bears ancient material; see Ophir Minz-Manor (2009), “Reflection of the Character of Jewish and Christian Poetry in Late Antiquity,” *Pe’amim*, 119: 131–172 (in Hebrew). On this, see further Jefim (Hayyim) Schirmann, (1970), “The Battle between Behemoth and Leviathan According to an Ancient Hebrew Piyyut,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities (English series)*, 4; Joseph Yahalom (1999), *Poetry and Society in Jewish Galilee of Late Antiquity* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad), in Hebrew. A clear demonstration of the transmission of Second Temple texts and traditions to the eleventh century is Michael E. Stone (1996), “The Genealogy of Bilhah [4QTNaph-4Q215],” *DSD Jonas Greenfield Memorial Issue*, 3(1): 20–36. On another possible such channel, see Martha Himmelfarb (1984), “R. Moses the Preacher and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” *AJS Review*, 9(1): 55–78, and also the discussion in Stone (1996), 20–36. John .C. Reeves’s work of 1994, *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha* (SBLJL 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press) is an excellent collection of essays demonstrating the complexity of this transmission and in the most recent generation, scholars understand more about these complex interweavings of traditions. Nonetheless, the intellectual and literary streams lying outside the dominant rabbinic tradition still need much clarification. Moreover, it should be stressed that with all the nuancing that these directions of research introduce, the Qumran covenanters’ specific terminology and language do not occur anywhere except among the Karaites. These are some examples of channels of transmission outside known rabbinic literature and they could be multiplied. However, investigation of such extra-rabbinic transmission contexts is outside the present study’s ambit.

literature.⁵⁹ “Channels of transmission” imply tradents and social groupings, and some of these may simply have been continuations of groups active in the Second Temple period.⁶⁰ Presumably, the destructive events of 70 and 135 did not completely wipe out all earlier social structures, though their impact engendered momentous changes. Still, after all currently known possibilities are surveyed, in the specific case of the *Damascus Document* in the Cairo Geniza, it remains most likely a witness to a medieval discovery of an ancient cave deposit.⁶¹

The modern find at Qumran included not only the aforementioned sectarian works, but also hymns, prayers, biblical commentaries, and sapiential and legal works that are completely unknown, either in the dominant Jewish tradition transmitted from antiquity or in what has survived from early Jewish material mediated through Christianity. Other newly uncovered works among the Scrolls include some astrological, physiognomic, and brontological writings, not all of which were composed by the Qumran Essene group.⁶²

59. See note 58 in this section.

60. It is possible that some Essene or analogous groups survived the tragedies of 70 and 132 CE. There is, however, no clear evidence for this, and the Qumran sectarian terminology has left no traces in rabbinic literature. See Naphtali Wieder (2005). John Reeves, who has studied aspects of this matter in fascinating detail, says, “However it is to be explained, it is manifestly clear that Second Temple Jewish writings of a sectarian hue remained available among certain groups of Islamicate Jewry, and hence potentially accessible to Western Jewish communities, as well as non-Jewish antiquarians, intellectuals, and religious fanatics.” John C. Reeves (1999), 162–163. In that fine article, he also explores various possible connections between Second Temple period texts and groups and first-millennium CE knowledge about and perhaps the existence of such groups in the Islamicate world. Compare also John C. Reeves (1996), 44–46. He discusses the Karaite connection there as well. Guy Stroumsa (2015a), 5–8, speaks of the continuation of Jewish–Christian and other similar groups as late as the seventh century.

61. It is also barely possible that it was transmitted by some unknown group, which observed secrecy, as did the ancient Essenes. This explanation, however, is purely speculative, and, in light of what we know today, I regard the idea of a medieval discovery of a cave to be the more likely solution to this riddle.

62. Jonas C. Greenfield and Michael Sokoloff (1989), “Astrological and Related Omen Texts in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic,” *JNES* 48.3: 201–214; Esther Eshel (1999), *Demonology in Palestine during the Second Temple Period*

The absence from the general transmission of Second Temple Jewish literature, not only of the writings that have been categorized as sectarian, but also of any of the characteristic sectarian terminology, is noteworthy.⁶³ Strikingly, we know *none* of the “sectually explicit” (to use Carol Newsom’s apt designation) writings found at Qumran from direct Jewish or Christian transmission, except for the Geniza copies of the *Damascus Document*, which we have already discussed.⁶⁴ Moreover, both contemporary and later sources transmitted through the ages in the Jewish Aramaic and Hebrew tradition exhibit no knowledge of the Qumran group and its typical terminology and ideas as witnessed by the sectarian scrolls.⁶⁵ This strongly suggests that members of the Qumran group indeed obeyed the strictures of their oaths not to reveal the writings, as is related in the ancient testimonies about the Essenes as well as in their own writings that stress that their teachings were secret. The group’s name was known from Pliny and other sources, but its particular teachings and practices remained hidden until its writings came to light and that was, as we have said, fortuitous.⁶⁶

(dissertation; Jerusalem: Hebrew University) in Hebrew, and further extensive literature cited there.

63. There is a certain apparent circularity in the argument here. However, the specificity of the vocabulary in the sectarian works is so unmistakable and it occurs in such a concentration that its absence is probative. And, of course, it was not *necessary* that the Qumran sect have clearly marked terms of their own, but they did.

64. See §4.3, notes 55 and 67.

65. This lack of continuity is highlighted by the contrast with the features that the Qumran sect shared with the Karaites. See, for example, the discussion by Wieder (2005), especially Chapters 3–5, pages 95–160. Wieder strongly believes that there was a connection, but even one less convinced than he finds the distinctive coincidences of the two groups striking. This connection may have been due to the eighth-century find of scrolls in a cave of which knowledge survives (see §4.3, note 49) or by some other such discovery about which we do not happen to have any information. The evidence for the possible survival of “Zadokite” groups and their contribution to the rise of Karaism is discussed by Reeves (1996), 44–45.

66. On speculations that more than one library was deposited in the caves at Qumran and that various caves preserved different corpora of material see Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (2007), “Old Caves and Young Caves. A Statistical Reevaluation of a Qumran Consensus,” *DSD* 14(3), 313–333. The hypothesis put forward by Joan E. Taylor (2012), “Buried Manuscripts and Empty Tombs: The Qumran *Geniza*

Its writings are at our disposal only because of an archaeological find. Moreover, the modern discovery of caves at Qumran and their remarkable contents was not the first one.⁶⁷

In the end, then, we know of the Qumran covenanters and their writings only from that archaeological discovery. Moreover, Josephus's statements that the Essenes kept their teachings secret concords with the conclusion to be drawn from assessing the books that did survive from the Second Temple period and were transmitted down the centuries.⁶⁸ The name of the Essenes and some of their most striking observable, external features were known, but their inner teachings and practices were secret. This all leads to the conclusion that the Essenes were a secret group and clearly concords with ancient descriptions of them. The same conclusion is to be drawn from the modern discovery of the library of an Essene community at Qumran.⁶⁹

Theory Revisited," in Maeir Aren, Jodi Magness, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (eds.), *'Go Out and Study the Land' (Judges 18:2): Archeological, Historical and Textual Studies in Honor of Hanan Eshel* (JSJSup, 148; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 269–315, is perhaps less convincing. However, she does adduce a number of interesting references in ancient texts to the burial of manuscripts: See especially pp. 287–289. See also the discussion of Stephen J. Pfann (2007), "Reassessing the Judean Desert Caves: Libraries, Archives, Genizas and Hiding Places," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society*, 25: 147–170.

67. See §4.3, note 55.

68. Philo in *Every Good Man Is Free* 12.82 describes the teaching of the Essenes in the course of their Sabbath convocation in synagogues, saying that after reading from the holy volume "another of the men of the greatest experience comes forward and explains what is not very intelligible, for a great many precepts are delivered in enigmatic modes of expression, and allegorically, as the old fashion was." The remarks on *ainigma* and on the Hellenistic interpretation of myths made by Guy G. Stroumsa (2005), 11–14, 17–20, and 52 are relevant to this statement, which clearly implies that some inner teaching is exegetical. Steven Di Mattei (2006), "Moses; *Physiologia* and the Meaning and Use of *Physikos* in Philo's Exegetical Method," *SPA* 18: 3–32, especially p. 8, argues that "physiologia" designates a sort of "mystical hermeneutic" (p. 3), a "contemplation of the cosmos and the heavenly bodies" (8).

69. There is no reason to assume that the deposits of books in the Qumran caves were the only Essene "library," §4.3, note 66. Even if the deposit was the Temple library from Jerusalem (and there is nothing that indicates this) or one or various collections brought holus-bolus from outside to be safe from peril or for some

Consequently the Dead Sea Scrolls provide us with some of the actual documents that the group considered esoteric or secret. These documents do not have an “occult” character in the common, Western sense, but are concerned with the community, the *Yahad*, its organization, its spiritual standing, and its self-conscious position in the timetable of eschatological events.⁷⁰ We conclude therefore that the Qumran group of Essenes was a group that cultivated and transmitted secret teaching and that the sectarian scrolls from the Qumran find constituted part of that secret teaching.

I wish to stress once more that the covenanters’ sectarian works were unknown before the chance event of the archaeological discovery. Traditional Jewish and Christian literature is not familiar with these works, their particular views, and their distinct terminology. This point is of capital importance.

At Qumran, moreover, writings were discovered in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages, a point significant for our inquiry. The Aramaic writings are often considered to be pre- or non-Essene, and some scholars make a case for a revival of composition in Hebrew from the second century BCE.⁷¹ Another suggestion is that, by using Hebrew for their own teachings, the Qumran covenanters signaled their particular importance, whereas Aramaic is often used for scholarly and esoteric scientific texts.⁷²

other reason (as some maintain), the facts of the affinity between the various sectarian writings and yet their not being known from continuous Jewish or Christian transmission remain. This is so even if there is evidence for discovery of some caves in the same area during the two millennia that have passed since their deposit: See §4.3, note 55. We can learn about the group’s teachings and practice only from their own, i.e., the sectarian documents themselves.

70. See Krister Stendahl (1958), “The Scrolls and the New Testament: An Introduction and a Perspective,” in Krister Stendahl (ed.), *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (London: SCM Press), 7–17.

71. Eibert Tigchelaar reviews some theories advanced to explain Qumran Hebrew’s function in: “Sociolinguistics and Which Dead Sea Scrolls?” paper delivered at the meeting of IOQS 2013 in Munich on August 6, 2013.

72. See Jonathan Ben-Dov (2010), 389–390. Also see Jonathan Ben-Dov and Seth L. Sanders (2014), *Ancient Jewish Sciences: 6. Ideals of Science: The Infrastructure*

What is more, some of the Hebrew and Aramaic sectarian texts were copied in cryptic scripts or cyphers that were created using invented, inverted, or otherwise disguised alphabets.⁷³ The employment of unusual types of writing is related to our subject insofar as it was most likely

of Scientific Activity in Apocalyptic Literature and in the Yaḥad, section 4.b “Translation, accommodation, language,” available at <http://dlib.nyu.edu/awdl/isaw/ancient-jewish-sciences/chapter6.xhtml>. Takamitsu Muraoka remarks that (p.344) “Qumran Hebrew. . . [is] such that it must have had its basis in a community that used Hebrew as a means of oral communication. It is hardly an artificial means of literary creativity,” in T. Muraoka (2000), “Hebrew,” in L.H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1.340–345, especially 344. If correct, Muraoka’s view runs against ideas of a revival of Hebrew composition and may imply a call for a reassessment of the issue of languages in Judea. Mladen Popović nuances Ben-Dov and Sanders’ constataion in that he recognizes different levels of Mesopotamian scientific knowledge, with the complex ones not being translated at all into Aramaic from Babylonian: See Mladen Popović (2014), 174–182. Seth L. Sanders (2017 forthcoming), *From Adapa to Enoch: Scribal Culture and Religious Vision in Judea and Babylon*. (TSAJ, 167, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 159, discusses how secrecy became associated with Aramaic texts. As he puts it on p. 10, there is “a substantial difference in the nature of the later texts: the biblical Hebrew genres are public and political, while the Second Temple Aramaic genres are esoteric and scholarly.” Here he refers to the *Book of the Luminaries* and *Aramaic Levi Document’s* metrology. I acknowledge Dr. Sanders’s kindness in making his as-yet-unpublished work available to me. Two decades ago, Philip Alexander suggested a connection of the astrological physiognomy of 4Q186 with Mesopotamian learning: P. S. Alexander (1996), “Physiognomy, Initiation, and Rank in the Qumran Community,” in H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger, and P. Schäfer (eds.), *Geschichte-Tradition-Reflexion*, 1 *Judentum* (Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr-Paul Siebeck), 385–394.

73. See Stephen Pfann (1994), “4Q298: The Maskil’s Address to All Sons of Dawn,” *JQR* 85: 203–235. This appears to be an example of such a secret document, and its editor argues convincingly that it contains secret sectarian teaching. It is written in the Cryptic A script, argued by Pfann to serve as a special hieratic style of writing. See his article on “Scripts and Scribal Practice,” in John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (eds.) (2010), *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI, & Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans), 1204–1207, and especially 1206. The relationship between the so-called cryptic scripts and esoteric teaching has not yet been thoroughly explored. In general, on the cryptic scripts, see Pfann (1994), 203–235, and Emanuel Tov (1995), “Letters of the Cryptic A Script and Paleo-Hebrew Letters used as Scribal Marks in some Qumran Scrolls,” *DSD*, 2(3): 330–339. Ben-Dov (2010), 393, agrees that cryptic scripts were used

intended to keep the particular written text secret⁷⁴ from the uninitiated or the unqualified.⁷⁵ This means of preserving their contents from unqualified eyes shows that there were grades of knowledge within the sectarian community.⁷⁶ Thus it is reasonable to regard the cryptic scripts in which these manuscripts were inscribed as related to secrecy.

Similarly, cryptic scripts were used in the Hellenistic–Roman cults to keep special knowledge secret. Jan Bremmer made the intriguing observation that in the initiation scene in Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* 11.22 the hero is shown books written in a strange alphabet.⁷⁷ These books, comprehensible only to certain of the priests, were shown as part of the initiation ceremony to the Isis mysteries.⁷⁸ Bremmer remarks that there are hints that this description of the mysterious script was influenced by Greek views of Egyptian glyphs or demotic script.⁷⁹ A different but analogous example is the following: in *Asc Isa* 9:22–23 the prophet is shown books that “had writing in them not like the books of this

particularly for certain sorts of scientific knowledge translated from Aramaic into Hebrew to “restrict its circulation in wider circles” (393). Alexander, in the article mentioned (note 72) highlights the cryptic script of 4Q186 (see Alexander [1996], 391) and speculates on its connection with the *maskil* and with priestly learning.

74. See §4.3, note 73.

75. See also April D. DeConick (2012), “From the Bowels of Hell to Draco: The Mysteries of the Peratics,” in Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (eds.), *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 76; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 3–38. She remarks on p. 12: “It appears that some mystery cult leaders even used books written in arcane letters so that they could only be read and interpreted by the priests on behalf of the initiates. This practice also safeguarded cult secrets from the eyes of the uninitiated.” See further, §4.3, note 79.

76. See further, Chapter 5, §5.1, on gradation and initiation.

77. Bremmer (2014). Observe also Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.22. Levi is also associated with reading and writing in *ALD* 13:6–7.

78. Bremmer (2014), 118. See DeConick (2012).

79. On attitudes to hieroglyphs, see Stroumsa (2005), 18, and Burns (2014), 18. Burns remarks on the “aura of mystery” surrounding Near Eastern priestly writing also among Greco–Roman philosophers. The prevalence of what Hornung calls “Epyptosophy” or the “esoteric-mystical view of Egypt” (25), in the Greco–Roman world and, indeed, down to modern Western Esotericism, is documented by Erik Hornung (2001), *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West*, David Lorton (trans.) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

world . . . and I read them.” Compare *Jos As* 22:13, in which verse Levi is said to be “sharp-sighted with his eyes, and he used to see letters written in heaven.” Somewhat differently, in 4 *Ezra* 14:42 we read “And the Most High gave understanding to those five men, and by turns they wrote what was dictated, in characters which they did not know.”⁸⁰ In the Hermenia Commentary on 4 *Ezra*, I connected the “characters which they did not know” with the introduction of the square Aramaic script for writing Hebrew in the period of Ezra.⁸¹ Moreover, the five scribes in 4 *Ezra* 14:24 are said to have skills of tachygraphy, writing swiftly, somewhat like the shorthand that was used in the last (twentieth) century. The use of tachygraphy to record revealed information is mentioned in other Jewish works of the time and in Hellenistic–Roman sources such as the *Epistle of Thessalos*.⁸² It is doubly intriguing that the swiftly writing scribes, both in 4 *Ezra* and in the *Epistle of Thessalos*, use their skill to write down divine revelations.⁸³

Samuel Thomas suggests that translation from Aramaic into Hebrew and copying in a cryptic script are related to secrecy, saying, “In other words, these works were incorporated into the *Yahad* by way of adaptive translation or transcription. These are especially interesting for the present study because they attest to a conscious effort either to update or to conceal (or both) a given text.”⁸⁴ His statement remains

80. In Daniel 5:5 mysterious writing appears on a wall. King Belshazzar could neither read nor interpret it (Daniel 5:7). Daniel, the inspired sage, read the mysterious letters and explained their meaning (Daniel 5:18–29).

81. Michael E. Stone (1990), 440. Because twenty-four of the books were to be made public so that the worthy and unworthy may read them, it does not make sense for them to be written in a cryptic script. However, the idea that the other seventy books are to be read only by the wise among the people does indicate that the idea of esoteric books was around.

82. Stone (1990), 430. André Jean Festugière (1939), “L’Expérience religieuse du médecin Thessalos,” *RB* 48: 45–77. See the description on p. 62 and Festugière’s note 23 there with the comparative material from Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*.

83. Thessalos does this to circumvent the mystagogue’s prohibition to record the vision of Asclepius, whereas in 4 *Ezra*, the writing is done at God’s behest.

84. See Samuel Thomas (2009), 26. On the nature of Qumran Hebrew as a living language, see Muraoka (2000). If Muraoka is correct, then Thomas’s statement about Hebrew becomes less persuasive.

a little unclear to me. Does he mean that works that were translated from Aramaic into Hebrew were treated thus to make their contents more incomprehensible to the occasional reader? And is this comparable to transcription from square Hebrew–Aramaic script into cryptic writing?⁸⁵

As we have said, it is a basic characteristic of esoteric and secret groups in society that the group's special knowledge, practice, or both were not revealed to outsiders.⁸⁶ Moreover, such groups are frequently structured hierarchically, and the secret information belonging to the group was revealed only in stages to those seeking admission or who, having been admitted, entered higher and higher ranks of the secret society.⁸⁷ We see from the references to cryptic writing⁸⁸ as well as from its actual occurrence at Qumran that not only were the writings revealed in stages, but also steps were taken to ensure that those not yet admitted into the appropriate rank could not read them.⁸⁹ This limitation of readership is surely the main function of the Qumran cryptic scripts, and it is typical of secret social groups.

The *maskil* was the authoritative teacher of the Qumran group;⁹⁰ this is explicit in 1QS 3:13 and virtually all of 1QS 9. It is significant

85. Thomas also suggests that this is particularly the case with scientific or divinatory texts. See my previous brief presentation about secrecy in Babylonian science in Chapter 3, §3.1, notes 15 and 16.

86. This is definitional and does not need demonstration. Yet Dylan Burns (2014), 18, says that “despite the injunctions to keep the rites secret, the content of the rites themselves appears to have been something of a public secret; divulging them was not itself illegal as much as was the ‘impiety’ of profaning them in public.” Despite this and despite the fact that the general purpose of the mystery cults was common knowledge, exact and detailed information about the initiation to the inmost grades is nowhere to be found in transmitted texts or in inscriptions.

87. See Lawrence E. Hazelrigg (1969), 324.

88. See §4.3, note 72.

89. In contrast, it seems that the final revelation of the admission process in the Eleusinian Mysteries was the showing of sacred objects [*epopteia*] rather than the revelation of secret books or written teachings. That experience called forth a very emotional response. See Bremmer (2012), 375–397, and especially 383–384.

90. See Carol A. Newsom (1990b), “The Sage in the Literature of Qumran: The Functions of the *Maškil*,” in J. G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (eds.), *The Sage*

that 4Q298, written in cryptic script, is titled, “Words of the *Maskil* to all the Sons of Dawn.” Some experts hold the view that the manuscripts in cryptic script were intended for his use alone.⁹¹ In any case, he was privy to the esoteric knowledge and had access to revealed knowledge (1QS 9:12–14 and 18). He ranked each member of the community in hierarchical order “according to the purity of his hands and according to his intellect”: see 1QS 9:12–19.⁹² Moreover, it is suggested that the *maskil* pronounced and was the hero of the *Self-Glorification Hymn* (4Q471), which refers to his heavenly ascent.⁹³ This accords with the view that the *maskil* is the one for whom or by whom the mystical *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* were performed.⁹⁴ These functions teach us that he must have held a very high position in the hierarchy.⁹⁵ In

in Israel and the Near East (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), 373–382. Carol A. Newsom (2004), 102–103, endorses the suggestion that the *Community Rule* “was composed as a guide for the community’s teacher, the Maskil” (102). See also her remarks on the tasks of the *Maskil* (189–190).

91. See Ben-Dov (2010), 379–399, and especially p. 393 and note 58. On the role of the *maskil*, see Charlotte Hempel (2013), 38, and notes there. García Martínez says that one of the *maskil*’s functions is to keep the secret dimension of Torah secret, reserved for the members of the community. See F. García Martínez (2007), 161, comparing 1QS 8:11–12. This statement should probably be nuanced to read “members of the community for whom knowledge of the secret is licit.” See also the remarks on mystery by Lorenzo DiTommaso (2014), 305–315, and particularly on the nature of mystery, which is, in apocalyptic thinking, the character of the heavenly knowledge made known by the apocalypse. This knowledge requires mediation and interpretation, for it is beyond normal human perception. This is the explanation, DiTommaso suggests, of the “cryptic and bizarre” features of apocalyptic visions (p. 312).

92. Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar (1999), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 2 vols. (Leiden, The Netherlands, New York, & Cologne: Brill), 93.

93. Philip S. Alexander (2006), 85–86. See on this text Esther Eshel (1996), “4Q471B: A Self-Glorification Hymn,” *RQ* 17: 175–203.

94. See Alexander (2006), 44–45, 48. In his discussion of ascent in the *Hodayot* David Larsen points out, for example, 1QH^a XI, 20–23; David J. Larsen (2014), “Enoch and the City of Zion: Can an Entire Community Ascend to Heaven?,” *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 53(1): 25–37, especially pp. 35–36.

95. Angela Kim Harkins (2012), 109–110, suggests that the *Hodayot* were performed by the *maskil*, “an individual who reenacted the affective experiences

addition to the *maskil*, in the *Damascus Document* and elsewhere the priests have a special role and, as far as we know, it is genealogically based.⁹⁶ The *maskil* differs from the priest in that he gains his authority through his access to esoteric knowledge and practice.⁹⁷

The varied nature of secret knowledge of the *Yahad* is stressed in this chapter, and we also discussed the exegetical aspect of the secret knowledge, special inspired exegesis of scriptural books that is revealed only within the community.⁹⁸ Other aspects of the community's knowledge are also claimed to be experiential, and the cultivation of such knowledge is evident in prayer texts and meditations such as the *Hodayot* [*Thanksgiving Hymns*] and *Bareki Napši* texts.⁹⁹ It is basically due to the discovery of the Scrolls that we gain considerable insight into this particular secret group of Essenes, its organization, and ideas.

described in the text" (p. 109). She attributes a special role in the hierarchy of members to the *maskil*, and his ability to reenact the experiences of the *Hodayot* gave the individual "his status as a religious virtuoso within the community" (p. 110). Judith Newman, speaking of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, remarks on the attribution of this document to the *maskil*, and on the thirteenth song as presenting "the angel-like priests with the *maskil* as their head as fully vested and equipped for their oracular performance." See Judith H. Newman (2008), "Priestly Prophets at Qumran: Summoning Sinai through the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*," in George J. Brooke, Hindy Najman, and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (eds.), *The Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity* (Themes in Biblical Narrative, 12; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 29–72, quotation from p. 39. Indeed Newman claims with some plausibility that, in addition of the legislated functions of the priests, the different grades of the community resonate with the architectural parts of the "animate Temple," the *Yahad*. She also compares this with 4Q164 (pp. 44–45). Consider also the remarks of Carol Newsom on the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* in Newsom (2012), 205–222.

96. On different views of the basis of priestly entitlement, see Martha Himmelfarb (2006), *A Kingdom of Priests: Ancestry and Merit in Ancient Judaism* (Jewish Culture and Contexts; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).

97. See Himmelfarb (2006), 117–123.

98. See discussion of exegetical techniques used to invoke religious experiences in Chapter 2, §2.3.

99. See Thomas (2009), 44. He also analyzes the use of *sod* in liturgical texts on pp. 131–134.

Of the Therapeutae,¹⁰⁰ another Jewish group cultivating secret teachings, we know only what the outsider Philo of Alexandria, the first-century Alexandrian exegete and philosopher, tells us.¹⁰¹ That information in turn may be colored by Greek ethnographic ideas and theories. If Philo's Therapeutai, who existed (so he claims) in Egypt in his day, are indeed a real group, and I see no real reason to deny that, they are in the same category as the Essenes as known from Philo and Josephus. Their existence and externally observable practice were known, but their inner teachings and practices are not transmitted in the ongoing Jewish and Christian traditions. They were not a group of Essenes, and one of many major differences is the celibate, predominantly male character of the Essenes¹⁰² and the naming and participation of women among the Therapeutae.¹⁰³ Women's acceptance of the contemplative lifestyle is very distinctive in the context of Philo's purposes of illustrating contemplative virtue.¹⁰⁴

Of this group, Philo says that: "[t]hey have also writings of men of a previous generation who became founders of the movement. These men left behind many expressions of the principle expressed in allegory, which

100. Philip R. Davies and Joan E. Taylor (1998), "The So-Called Therapeutae of 'De Vita Contemplativa': Identity and Character," *HTR* 91(1): 3–24, argue that to take the words *θεραπευται* and *θεραπευτιδες* in Philo's *de vita contemplativa* as the name of a sect is a misunderstanding, and that Philo uses the word with the meaning "servants of God." That may be correct, but it is not significant for our argument, for it is the existence of the group and its teachings and traditions that interests us, not their name. Davies and Taylor also affirm that a contemplative and devotional community of Jews is being described (pp. 8–10), and they discuss its specific location on Lake Mareot near Alexandria (12–14). Although I bear their caution in mind, for the sake of convenience I shall continue to use the name "Therapeutae," unless or until a new name for the group becomes accepted.

101. A description, synthesizing Philo's remarks, is the article by Joan E. Taylor (2007b), "Therapeutae," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., 19.699–701; a clear summary is also to be found in Collins (2010), 160–165.

102. Even though the group described in the *Damascus Document* and one of the Essene groups described in the Classical sources were "marrying Essenes," no function was ascribed to women similar to that evident in Philo's description of the Therapeutae.

103. See Davies and Taylor (1998), 14–15, quoted in note 100.

104. Davies and Taylor (1998), 14–15. They are not the first to reach this conclusion.

they use as models, imitating that method of study” (*de vita cont.* §29).¹⁰⁵ This statement, if it is to be taken seriously, speaks of the Therapeutae’s having secret books and perhaps a particular literary exegetical method. Taylor and Davies reviewed the classical sources and concluded that the Therapeutai and the Essenes, as described by Josephus and Philo, were quite different groups. This conclusion is rather convincing.¹⁰⁶

According to Philo (*de vita cont.* §29), then, the Therapeutae have many older documents containing allegorical exegesis that they imitate. In §78 he refers again quite clearly to esoteric exegesis, when he says that, “interpretations of the sacred Scriptures are given through hidden meanings in allegories” and also when he speaks of “the soul corresponding to the invisible meaning stored up in the words” and the mind that “discloses and reveals the symbols, leading forth the ideas naked.”¹⁰⁷ As Stroumsa makes clear in his study, in these passages we find a number of themes common in Hellenistic writing about exegesis.¹⁰⁸

Philo does speak of Therapeutai dreaming “of divine powers,” which indicates that dream revelations were in their repertoire. He adds in §26 of *de vita cont.*, “Many of them express the famous teachings of their sacred philosophy even while asleep and dreaming.”¹⁰⁹ This is a striking statement, particularly when compared with Enoch’s calling out in his sleep in 1 *Enoch* 83:5–6. That text describes Enoch as talking prophetically in his sleep, as a result of which Mahalalel addresses him. These

105. Translated by David M. Hay, in Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (2013), *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society), 3.2488–2489.

106. They are well discussed in Taylor (2010), 176–177. Looking at scholarship after the discovery of the Scrolls, Harry A. Wolfson in the 1948 edition of his book on Philo was already clear about this, and he is just one example out of many: Harry A. Wolfson (1947), *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1.68 and 2.265. See also Davies and Taylor (1998), 16.

107. Translation is by David M. Hay in Feldman et al. (2013), 3.2494–2495. Hay’s translation is excerpted here.

108. Quoted in §4.3, note 68.

109. Translation by David M. Hay in Feldman et al. (2013), 3.2488.

statements are unparalleled in other Jewish texts of the Second Temple period, although dream visions are widespread and well known.¹¹⁰

Because there is no reason to consider that Philo's account of the Therapeutae is a creation cut out of whole cloth, we may conclude that the Therapeutae cultivated an inner tradition of exegesis, referred to as a system of "allegorical interpretation," which was available at appropriate times (§§28–29). Likewise, it is possible that some revelatory technique related to talking during sleep was practiced, though, other than in 1 *Enoch* 83:5–6, such is not mentioned elsewhere. As distinct from the Essenes, among the Therapeutae women played an equal role in the community and its ceremonies and festivals (§§32–33, 88). There is a hierarchical ranking of members of the community by seniority of admission to the group (§31, 66, 67, 73). The newest adherents waited on the tables (§81, etc.). Like the Essenes, they wear white clothing (§66), but the role Philo ascribes to singing hymns and dancing in their ceremonies is not paralleled among the Essenes. Unfortunately, Philo gives no details of how new members joined the group or about initiation into its teachings.

Philo transmits only broad generalities about the content of this teaching, and alas! no Bedouin animal has fortuitously uncovered a cache of Therapeutae documents. So we do not know the actual content of their teaching or exegesis.¹¹¹ We may conclude nonetheless that these two groups, the Essenes and the Therapeutae, can both be properly described as esoteric or secret societies. Moreover, Philo describes both of them, and his descriptions show that they are quite different from one another.¹¹²

In this chapter first we examined secret or mystery religions in Greco–Roman antiquity. It was shown how the characteristics of secret

110. The most thorough recent discussion of dreams is Frances Flannery-Dailey (2004), *Dreamers, Scribes, and Priests: Jewish Dreams in the Hellenistic and Roman Eras* (JSJSup, 90; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill). She does not mention talking during sleep as a revelatory mode.

111. See Philo, *de vita contemplativa*, §§25–31.

112. Taylor (2010) and the comparison of Philo's Essenes and Therapeutae on pp. 176–177.

societies are present in them and that the ancients kept the inmost secrets of the mysteries faithfully. With this background in mind, we investigated the two most famous Jewish secret groups known from antiquity, the Essenes and the Therapeutae. It became clear, as far as the evidence allowed, that they had various characteristics typical of secret societies, including protecting secrets as a dominant factor, and the hierarchical admission to the knowledge of these secrets. In the coming chapter, I look at procedures of initiation and admission to these sects in greater detail.

CHAPTER 5

INITIATION AND GRADED REVELATION

5.1 INITIATION

Secret teaching and/or practice is the central feature of secret societies. The secret group must guard carefully against the danger of the improper revelation of these secrets. Indeed, that is the purpose at the root of the group's very existence. The dynamic engendered by this purpose affected the admission of new members, for it was necessary to ensure the trustworthiness of candidates for admission to the secret society. This was most often achieved by the institution of a careful process of selection of new members, with repeated testing and evaluation at fixed points in the process to ensure that only those were admitted who would become faithful keepers of the secret. Concurrently, the secret lore or practice was revealed to the potential new members of the secret society in a series of stages tied to the stages of the testing. Often the initiation was sealed by a solemn oath not to reveal the secret teaching or practice. This sort of procedure is clearly witnessed by the sources describing the Essenes and the Qumran covenanters.

Josephus in the *Jewish War* 2.141-142 describes a final stage of the process of initiation into the Essene group as follows:

141. . . [He swears] to conceal nothing from the members of the sect¹ and report none of their secrets to others, even though tortured to death.

1. Cf. 1QS 8:11-12, where, if "Israel" means "non-Qumran Jews," it is prescribed that nothing is to be withheld from the initiate.

142 . . . He [i.e., the initiate] swears, moreover, to transmit their rules exactly as he himself received them; to abstain from robbery; and in like manner carefully to preserve the books of the sect and the names of the angels. Such are the oaths by which they secure their proselytes.²

Thus admission to the Essene group was gradual and was finalized by the swearing of oaths. The Essenes initiates gained access to both teachings and books that they promised not to communicate outside the group. In addition, they studied the writings “of the ancients,” which were presumably not available to them before initiation.³ Initiates also swore that they would not keep anything secret from their fellows (*BJ* 2: 139–142).⁴

Both Josephus and Hippolytus make these statements about secret books and teachings communicated to initiates in the course of their admission to membership of the Essene community.⁵ Although certain well-known books of the Second Temple period, most strikingly the apocalypses, claimed to have been secretly revealed to “the wise” and passed on by them, it seems improbable that such books as *1 Enoch* and *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and the like, are what the Essenes taught,

2. *BJ* 2:141–142. We have, however, many texts from non-Essene sources of the Second Temple period that record angelic names. This is discussed in Chapter 3, note 3. The quotation is taken from Albert I. Baumgarten’s translation in Feldman, Kugel, and Schiffman (2013), 3.2893.

3. References to the study of writings of seniors and their exegesis also occur in Philo’s description of the Therapeutae: see Chapter 4, §4.3.

4. This condition is odd, as we shall see. Of course, full members of the sect kept secrets from the initiates, but this oath is described as the conclusion of the process of initiation. Moreover, the *maskil* apparently had knowledge that he did not share with the other members. However, perhaps the phrase refers to knowledge that members gained by inspiration. See *IQS* 8:11–12, which is discussed in Chapter 4, §4.3, and see §5.3, note 21.

5. Morton Smith (1958) argues that Josephus and Hippolytus used a common source independently. This was denied by Christoph Burchard (1977), “Die Essener bei Hippolyt, Ref. IX 18, 2–28, 2 und Josephus, Bell. 2, 119–161,” *JSJ* 8: 1–41. A recent analysis of the passages in Philo relating to the Essenes is given by Joan E. Taylor (2007a), “Philo of Alexandria on the Essenes: A Case Study on the Use of Classical Sources in Discussions of the Qumran-Essene Hypothesis,” *SPA* 19: 1–28.

under the sanction of oaths of secrecy, to those joining their community.⁶ It is more probable that sectarian writings like those that have been recognized among the Dead Sea Scrolls were included among the secretly transmitted teachings. Because these sectarian writings *and their typical terminology* are unknown outside Qumran, we must conclude that, for this Essene group at least, they came under the ban included in the initiates' oaths at the time of their adhesion to the sect.⁷ The members did not reveal them.

In 1QS 6:13b–23:16 the *Community Rule* describes the admission process as follows. Initially, “the man appointed [*paqid*] at the head of the many” examined the postulant. Later the members of the association (the “Many” or *Rabbim*) subjected him to another examination. Until this admission process and tests were successfully concluded he could not approach the “purity” of the Many.⁸ Charlotte Hempel suggests in a recent analysis of the nature of the admission process in the *Community Rule* that this probably relates to halachic issues of food and drink purity; so the graded admission process had also to do with gradually increasing proximity to the ritually pure food of the Many.⁹ Moreover, 1QS 5:20b–24a, referring to the admission of new members,

6. See Chapter 2, §2.3, and Chapter 6, §6.1 and §6.2, where the claimed esoterism of the apocalypses is discussed.

7. In fact, there is no decisive proof that the sectarian writings from Qumran were the books the sectaries transmitted to their newly admitted members though, as has been said, this seems rather likely. An early presentation of the initiation according to the *Community Rule* and the *Damascus Document* is to be found in Millar Burrows (1955), *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking Press), 234–235. The legal framework surrounding initiation in the *Community Rule* is analyzed and described by Lawrence H. Schiffman (1983), *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Courts, Testimony and the Penal Code* (Brown Judaic Studies 33; Chico, CA: Scholars Press), 161–165. A recent and detailed discussion is to be found in Charlotte Hempel (2013), 28–31.

8. Extreme positions on issues of purity were typical of the *haburot* and, as Lieberman points out, also of certain sects mentioned in rabbinic literature. See Saul Lieberman (1952), “The Discipline in the So-Called Dead Sea Manual of Discipline,” *JBL* 71(4): 199–206.

9. Schiffman noted this in 1983, but he did not develop the matter in detail. See Schiffman (1983), 161–165.

shares with 1QS 1:16–2:25a the connection between the admission of new members and the reassessment of existing members as an annual event.¹⁰ It is significant for us to observe that the initiate enters the group through a graded and carefully controlled process of admission and, moreover, that an annual evaluation of admitted members was also conducted.¹¹ This shows that the trustworthiness of members was of the highest importance to the group.

So far, we have talked about admission to the sect as prescribed by the *Community Rule* and as described by Josephus. The admission process according to the *Damascus Document* is somewhat different and less explicitly elaborate. At its heart is swearing an oath to return to the Law of Moses (CD 15:5b–6a). Hempel has noted that a similar, simple process of admission by swearing an oath is also found in 1QS 5:7c–9a, a passage that is apparently drawn from an external source and embedded at this point into the *Community Rule*¹²:

7c Whoever enters the council of the Community

8 enters the covenant of God in the presence of all who freely volunteer. He shall swear with a binding oath to revert to the Law of Moses, according to all that he commanded, with whole

9 heart and whole soul, in compliance with all that had been revealed of it to the sons of Zadok, the priests who keep the covenant and interpret his will, and to the multitude of the men of his covenant.¹³

Hempel contrasts this simple procedure with the complex and rigorous admission process in the *Community Rule* as it is described in 1QS

10. Hempel (2013), 28–31, tends to a chronological explanation of these differences of procedures, which developed and changed over time.

11. Fraade observes that this is mentioned by Saul Lieberman as a point of similarity between the Qumran sectaries and the *ḥaburot*; see Steven D. Fraade (2009), “Qumran *Yahad* and Rabbinic *Hăbûrâh*; A Comparison Reconsidered,” *DSD* 16: 433–453 and especially 439.

12. Hempel (2013), 29.

13. García Martínez and Tigchelaar (1999), 1.81. In §5.1 we mentioned the affinity between CD the *Damascus Document* and this passage in 1QS 5.

6:13b–23.16. The passage 1QS 5:7c–9a, moreover, does not refer to secrecy, oaths, or the revelation of secrets.¹⁴

There is a striking parallel between graded initiation, with its staggered revelation of secrets and stages of access to the group's purity (cf. Hempel [2012]), and the visionary ascent of a seer to the heavens. In descriptions of ascents, the heavens are conceived of as layers or spheres, usually seven in number, each layer higher than the one preceding, or each concentric sphere outside the one before it. Upon entry into each of the heavens, the seer learns another, higher grade of knowledge than in the preceding layer or sphere. In some of the ascent narratives, knowledge of a password or a "seal" or some other special information enabling him to pass an ordeal at entry is necessary so he can advance to the next heaven. This is, of course, very reminiscent of stages of initiation into secret societies, at each of which new knowledge is revealed and the initiate is tested as to whether he is fit to go on to the next stage of initiation. However, because I am familiar with no explicit discussion of this parallel in ancient sources, all I can do for the moment is signal this fascinating parallel.¹⁵

5.2 HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE

The influence of secrecy, Simmel posits, led secret societies to tend to develop hierarchical structures. He connects this development with the graded initiations and "[t]he refinement and systematization with which secret societies are marked in a special way."¹⁶ Thus Simmel posits a process that Hazelrigg explicates as follows: "the unique structure

14. Charlotte Hempel, (2012). Compare also her earlier paper, Charlotte Hempel (1998–1999), "Community Structures in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Admission, Organization, Disciplinary Procedures," in Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 2.67–92. See also Burrows (1955), Schiffman (1983), and Hempel (2013).

15. See Chapter 7, §7.3, where ascent narratives are discussed. I intend further to research this similarity.

16. Georg Simmel (1906), 478.

of the secret society, built as it is around the protective function of secrecy, is highly susceptible to an increasing centralization of authority into a single pyramidal hierarchy.”¹⁷ Simmel points out that this tendency is also reflected in costume and ritual, which serve the purpose of marking the hierarchy and the members’ positions in it.¹⁸ The dynamic engendered by secrecy thus produces further means of its own protection.

Josephus does mention the Essenes’ clothing. He says that, once initiated, they wear white garments but he says nothing about further hierarchical distinction being marked by varied garments (*BJ* 2:123). The same is true of Philo’s description of the Therapeutae. He likewise does not mention the use of special clothing to mark rank, although rituals and ceremonies were celebrated. At Qumran, the various examinations of candidates and members are one sort of ceremonial event or ritual, the admission ceremony another, and the annual covenant-renewal ceremony a third. All these are mentioned in the *Community Rule*. Here we see once more that characteristics mentioned by Simmel and Hazelrigg are present both in the descriptions of the Essenes and also in the community’s legal codes.

There are indications that the *Rabbim*, or the Many, the body of admitted members, were also ranked hierarchically. Some scholars have argued that according to 1QS*a* (the *Rule of the Congregation*) an elite group existed that was regarded as holier than the body of full members.¹⁹ John Collins discusses clearly and concisely the apparent differences among the social structures reflected in the *Community Rule*, the *Damascus Document*, and the *Rule of the Congregation*.²⁰ From our perspective, these differences, which likely reflect variations

17. Lawrence E. Hazelrigg (1969), 329.

18. Simmel discusses this hierarchical structure in (1906), 478–481.

19. “This elite group is called ‘the council of the community,’ which is the name of the whole sect in the *Community Rule*, and is also identified with ‘the sons of Zadok and the men of their covenant’”: see Collins (2010). See my remarks in Chapter 4, §4.3.

20. Collins (2010), 60. In this book he summarizes the debate and clearly outlines the main approaches that have been taken.

among diverse but similar Essene groups, might also be correlated with temporal, geographical, or social distance among the various groups.

Samuel Thomas discerns three different levels of Qumran secrecy, formulating the progression in terms of types of knowledge that were permitted²¹:

1. The community vs. all Israel.
2. Various gradations of knowledge or secrecy within the community.
3. Summit = the *maskil*; see 1QS 9:18–19: “He should lead them with knowledge and in this way teach them the mysteries of wonder and truth [רזי פלא ואמת] in the midst of the men of the community, so that they walk perfectly, one with another, in all that has been revealed to them.”²²

If we accept the view that “the council of the community” is an elite group within the *Rabbim*, in addition to Thomas’s three levels of knowledge a fourth level must be added. It should be inserted between the admitted members and the *maskil*.²³ Both Thomas and I agree in clearly discerning hierarchical structures among the covenanters, characterized by different types of knowledge. In short, all these descriptions of groups of Essenes whom we have surveyed say that the Essenes had more or less complex hierarchical structures.²⁴ This accords with

21. Samuel Thomas (2009), 41–43. This, of course, means that the oath in the initiation ceremony not to withhold information must be interpreted as I suggest, or similarly. It is impossible to maintain that every member of the sect, regardless of rank, shared everything they knew with all the other members. See the discussion in §5.1, note 4.

22. Thomas (2009), p. 43. He cites the text from García Martínez and Tigchelaar (1999), 1.93.

23. This is so if his level 2’s nonspecified “various gradations” is taken to designate the postulants and the admitted members.

24. Collins (2010). He notes that the *Community Rule* is thoroughly hierarchical and has a more developed set of community officials than the *Damascus Document*. In this, he differs from Regev, who regards the *Damascus Document* as being more hierarchical and therefore, in his view, later.

Simmel's statement cited at the beginning of this section that hierarchical structures are typical of secret groups.

There are other indications that different levels of knowledge existed among the fully initiated members of the sect. Although an interesting phrase in 1QS 4:6–7 (the *Community Rule*) ascribes to the righteous, that is, the members of the Qumran sect, a spirit of “concealment concerning the truth of the mysteries of knowledge,” in 1QS 8:1–19 the special treatment of certain initiates is specified, a body of twelve laymen and three priests. First they are “grounded in the instruction of the *Yahad*” for two years. It is clear that the “instruction of the *Yahad*” is knowledge that is taught to all initiates, including priests, as well as to this group of fifteen, and the instruction takes the two years' initiation. Following this instruction, the chosen three priests and twelve laymen are to be “set apart as holy in the midst of the men of the *Yahad*” and are to be taught “every matter that is hidden from Israel but which has been found out by the Interpreter.”²⁵ Other, additional knowledge is taught to this special group, confirming that there were distinct groups or levels of knowledge among the initiates.²⁶ Moreover, certain knowledge was available only to the *maskil*, the person charged with preserving and teaching the group's knowledge and secrets. It is because of these passages that speak of an inner, elite group of members to whom particular knowledge was available that we may conclude that hierarchical distinctions were drawn among the initiated members of the group that were correlated with the knowledge permitted them.²⁷

There was therefore a hierarchical structure that permeated various dimensions of the community's life: Structural aspects were regulated

25. Observe the special exegetical tradition apparently referred to here. Compare with the particular exegetical tradition ascribed to the Therapeutae discussed in Chapter 4, §4.3. Contemplation of sacred books is a well-known technique for inducing alternative states of consciousness: See Chapter 2, §2.3.

26. It is unclear to us how this group of fifteen might relate to the special elite group some speculate existed, based on 1QS^a. Regev (2007), 183–184, discusses this group and its relation to the *Yahad* or the *Rabbim*.

27. Hierarchical seniority is also the foundation of legal provisions for conduct of members in gatherings and in their relationships with one another, as is well known.

according to it such as order of seating in communal assemblies or the right of speech there. Governance was also structured and hierarchical, as was admission to secret knowledge, food preparation, and purity requirements, as well as many other aspects of life, conduct, and knowledge. Hierarchy in seating and the like may also be observed in various Hellenistic voluntary associations whose regulations survived and have been discussed by Weinfeld, Gillihan, and others.²⁸ I do not mention these Hellenistic voluntary associations to explain the Essene sectarian structures. However, the partial parallels between them and the Essenes, who were their contemporaries, show similar social dynamics at work in the same time period and the same broad geographical region. Baumgarten, in an important study, suggests that groups like both the Essenes and the Hellenistic voluntary associations may have developed as a result of changes in the Hellenistic world, especially urbanization and consequent developments. He too does not maintain that there was a direct influence of such associations on Jewish sectarianism.²⁹

This chapter focused on two particularly typical features of secret societies, which were highlighted by Simmel. Admission to the group and to its secret knowledge and practice was closely controlled. This was an outcome of the value attributed to the secret around which the group was organized. In the instance of the Essenes, the secret society was very inclusive or “greedy,”³⁰ controlling as many aspects of the member’s life as possible. Thus the community also separated itself from others. It was the controlled admission that exemplified this

28. Moshe Weinfeld (1986), *The Organizational Pattern and the Penal Code of the Qumran Sect* (NTOA, 2; Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) discusses similarities at the organizational level between the Qumran sect and Hellenistic voluntary associations. See also Collins (2010), 79–80, on this, and the recent extensive book by Gillihan (2012). Such voluntary clubs are sometimes taken as a pattern for possible Hermetic associations in Egypt; see Christian H. Bull (2015), 117. Regev (2007), 12–15, denies the connection of such associations with the Qumran sectaries.

29. See Albert I. Baumgarten (1998).

30. On inclusiveness, see the clear, summary remarks of Hazelrigg (1969), 324.

inclusiveness and the consequential self-separation. The Qumran covenants also maintained a complex and strict hierarchical structure that controlled which members had greater or lesser access to the secret. The need to protect highly valued secret knowledge or practices also engendered this hierarchical structure.³¹

31. See Hazelrigg (1969), 326–329.

CHAPTER 6

OTHER SECRET JEWISH GROUPS AND TRADITIONS

The conclusion of the last chapter naturally raises this question: Were the Essenes and Qumran covenanters and the Therapeutae the only Jewish secret societies in the Second Temple period? Our information about other ancient Jewish esoteric groups and schools, as well as traditions concerning special types of knowledge and practice, is sparse. Among such groups there may have been “secret secret” societies, that is secret societies whose very existence was also kept secret. Some such groups are discussed here, though, as Hazelrigg rightly remarks, their very secrecy forms an obstacle to knowledge of them:¹

1. *Magicians and Exorcists*. Magical and theurgic elements permeated Greco–Roman religious life, particularly in the private sphere.² Jewish magicians were known in the Greco–Roman world,³ and

1. Lawrence E. Hazelrigg (1969) remarks justly, talking of possible verification of the propositions he formulates, that “One point stands out in particular: the secret society is secret, in at least some of its features, and this poses certain obstacles to any empirical investigation of the organization.” (p. 329). See Sarah Iles Johnston (2007), pp. 108–109, on secret (or absolute) secrecy and its drawbacks for religious groups. In Simmel (1906), Simmel already remarked on this sort of radical secrecy and its implications (pp. 470–72).

2. Burns (2014) gives an overview on pp. 19–21.

3. Menahem Stern (1974), *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy), referring to Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 30.11; consult his discussion on 1.498–499. See also Posidonius, cited by Strabo, *Geog.* 16.2, on magical procedures used by sorcerers to extract asphalt from the Dead Sea (Stern [1974], 1.147).

the Jewish elements incorporated into the Greek magical papyri provide a further indication of the existence of Jewish magical activity. H. D. Betz has presented these very clearly, supplementing evidence that Morton Smith pointed out on the magical gems and the like.⁴ In all likelihood there were groups or social institutions that transmitted the “trade secrets” of magicians⁵ and of writers of amulets,⁶ though the latter barely surface in Jewish literary texts.⁷

4. See note 5 in this chapter. Compare, concerning magical gems: Morton Smith (1979), “Relations between Magical Papyri and Magical Gems,” *Papyrologica Bruxellensia* 18: 129–136, and idem. (1981), “Old Testament Motifs in the Iconography of the British Museum’s Magical Gems,” *Coins, Culture and History in the Ancient World: Numismatic and Other Studies in Honor of Bluma L. Trell* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press), 187–194.

5. Leaving Josephus aside for the moment, for the sake of illustration observe the reports of Jewish magicians in Menahem Stern (1974), which include Pliny the Elder, *Nat. Hist.* 1.498–499; and on Jannes and Mambres, see Albert Pietersma (1994), *The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians: P. Chester Beatty XVI (with new editions of Papyrus Vindobonensis Greek inv. 29456+29828 verso and British Library Cotton Tiberius B. v f. 87)*, (Leiden, The Netherlands, & New York: Brill). The patriarch Joseph is portrayed as a magician in Pompeius Trogus 2:7 (Menahem Stern [1974], 1.337). On Jewish magic in general, see Gideon Bohak (2008), *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press) and idem. (2009), “Prolegomena to the Study of the Jewish Magical Tradition,” *Currents in Biblical Research*, 8: 107–150. The later Jewish magical book, *Sefer Ha-Razim*, also describes an ascent experience but the knowledge it sought had to do with invocation of angelic powers and the like. It contains some Greek magical terms and a short prayer in Greek. See Margalioth (1966), Morgan (1983), and Rebiger and Schäfer (2009). See also Betz (2003). Both the “Mithras Liturgy” and *Sefer Ha-Razim* are discussed in Chapter 4, §4.1, and note 21. A procedure of study, preparation and fasting, and then a revelation of the god Asclepius are described in some detail in the ancient first-person document, the *Letter of Thessalos*, published by André Jean Festugière (1939).

6. Bohak (2008), 70–142. He highlights the paucity of the evidence available, but analyzes central passages in detail. He stresses the absence of amulets from the archeological finds (pp. 114–115) and suggests on the basis of this lack of archeological evidence that the Jews did not use written amulets in the Second Temple age. Certainly, they were not common.

7. See Hans Dieter Betz (1997), “Jewish Magic in the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM VII.260–71),” in Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg (eds.), *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium* (Leiden, The Netherlands, & New York: Brill), 45–63, and indeed that whole volume is relevant to the present

Josephus, *AJ* 8.46–48, describes an exorcism by a certain Eleazar. To expel a demon he used a special ring inscribed with King Solomon's name together with adjurations and incantations.⁸ Eleazar himself probably did not compose the incantations using Solomon's name or invent the magical act by which the demon was expelled or the idea of having a ring inscribed with Solomon's name. The adjurations,

discussion. This is, however, no coherent body of evidence. Likewise, earlier on, magical elements were discerned by writers of Jesus's biographies, a notable example of which is Morton Smith (1978), *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper and Row). More has been written on that subject, and bibliographical indications are given in the works mentioned. Consider also the discussion of King Solomon and demonology in notes 8 and 10. There is a great deal of literature on Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian magic. On the magical gems and amulets, see John G. Gager (1992), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press), and on the magical bowls and amulets see Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked (1985), *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press) and Shaul Shaked and Joseph Naveh (1993), *Magical Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press), and other works. Magical gems are also discussed in Roy Kotansky, (2006), "Amulets," in Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 60–71; note pp. 66–67. Some gems have been found with Jewish elements engraved on them: See Morton Smith (1981). Todd E. Klutz (2013) discusses "[t]he interpenetration of Judaism and paganism" in the magico-religious work, "The Eighth Book of Moses," in Richard Baukham, James R. Davila, and A. Panayatov (eds.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1.189–235, especially pp. 189, 193–199, and 204–206. Concerning the interplay between the magical and neo-Platonic materials, on alchemy, and on heavenly ascent within the magical tradition, see, among others, Betz (2003), Arthur D Nock (1934), "A Vision of Mandulis Aion," *HTR* 27(1): 53–104, and others. It is not my brief here, however, to describe these branches of ancient learning.

8. See the discussion of Solomon and exorcism in Benjamin G. Wright III (2011), "Solomon in Chronicles and Ben Sira: A Study in Contrasts," in Jeremy Corley and Harm van Grol (eds.), *Rewriting Biblical History: Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honour of Pancratius C. Beentjes* (DCL Studies, 7; Berlin: De Gruyter), 139–157, especially pp. 141–142. See also Eibert Tigchelaar (in press), "Evil Spirits in the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Brief Survey and Some Perspectives," in J. Frey and E.E. Popkes (eds.), *Die Ursprünge des Bösen: dualistische und dämonologische Konzepte in essenisch-qumranischen Texten; Beiträge der VII. Schwerter Qumrantagung* (WUNT II, Tübingen, Germany).

magical acts, and paraphernalia were presumably received teaching.⁹ We may reasonably assume that here too esoteric knowledge both of formulae of exorcism and of the accompanying practice and the ring were used, though the text does not state that explicitly.¹⁰ Indeed, the

9. See Bohak (2008), 100–103.

10. For a discussion of Solomon's character as magician and of this passage in particular, see Pablo A. Torijano (2002), *Solomon the Esoteric King — From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition* (JJSup, 72; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), especially 102–103. This aspect of the Solomon figure is also evident, as I already noted, in 11QapPs^a and other places. The literature is quite extensive: See David Flusser (1966), "Qumrân and Jewish 'Apotropaic' Prayers," *IEJ* 16(3): 194–204; Ida Fröhlich (2008), "'Invoke at Any Time.' Apotropaic Texts and Belief in Demons in the Literature of the Qumran Community," *Biblische Notizen* 137: 41–74. On the mention of Solomon's name in 11QapPs^a (11Q11 4.ii.2), see Ida Fröhlich (2013), "Magical Healing at Qumran (11Q11) and the Question of the Calendar," in Helen Jacobus, Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme, and Philippe Guillaume (eds.), *Studies on Magic and Divination in the Biblical World* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press), 39–49, especially pp. 41–42. Josephus, AJ 8:45 says that God taught exorcism and incantations to Solomon. See, in general, on Second Temple demonology, Esther Eshel (1999). Dennis C. Duling (1985), "The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon's Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus's 'Antiquitates Judaicae' 8:42–49," *HTR* 78(1–2): 1–25, analyzes in detail many aspects of this particular passage from Josephus, notably in the context of other exorcism and miracle stories. However, he does not raise issues that might bear on answers to the questions we are posing. Another interesting analysis of the passage is to be found in Bohak (2008), 100–103. From a different perspective, see Susan R. Garrett (1989), *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress). It is to be noted that demons are mentioned in ancient sources, including Josephus, the Gospels, etc. As noted in the text, demons play a major role in *Testament of Solomon*, which work is apparently later than the Second Temple period. 1 *Enoch* mentions demons together with the Fallen Angels story. Of course, the Hebrew Bible also mentions demons: See Theodore H. Gaster (1962), "Satan," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN, & New York: Abingdon), 4.224–228; Joanne K. Kuemmerlin-McLean (1992), "Demons," in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York & London: Doubleday), 2.138–140; and G. J. Riley (1999), "Demon," in Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Piet van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (DDD)*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden, The Netherlands, New York, and Cologne: Brill), 235–240. Belief in the existence of demons was a commonplace, but specific techniques of exorcism were mysterious and hidden, and therefore specially trained practitioners were required.

tradition of Solomonic magic also surfaces in other ancient texts. In 11Q11 (11QapPs^a) Solomon's name is mentioned in connection with exorcism,¹¹ and further such traditions permeate it.¹²

It is impossible in the present state of the evidence to assert unequivocally that those magical and exorcistic teachings, procedures, paraphernalia, and texts of which we know show that Jewish magicians or Jewish exorcists were part of one or more crystallized esoteric schools or traditions. The theoretical and practical knowledge must, of course, have been learned, and that implies a procedure of transmission, and it is likely that such teaching was not available freely to the general public. There could, however, have been individual instruction. Moreover, the similarities of Jewish and Greek magic and the presence of theurgical material in the Jewish Merkabah mystical tradition are diffused enough to make us wary of simply positing the existence of such organizations as a secret society of magicians or schools for training them. However, to me it seems not unlikely that such organizations existed, and there is one piece of information preserved by Josephus that points in this direction, the school of Judas the Essene, discussed in the next listing.

2. *Future Prediction.* Josephus, *AJ* 13.311, refers to the school of Judas the Essene, where future prediction was taught. We read that Judas's school was composed of "his companions and friends,

11. See Bohak (2008), 108–111. He also discusses the fragmentary exorcistic scroll 4Q560, which is written in Aramaic. Esther Eshel dealt with demons and exorcism texts in her doctoral dissertation, Eshel (1999).

12. See note 7 in this chapter. Pablo A. Torijano (2002) adduces additional material on Solomon's power over demons. It may be that the *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:17–21 also refers to Solomon's being endowed with power over spirits, understood as demons. The text reads πνευμάτων βίαις, where the word πνεῦμα has been taken either as "spirits" or as "winds." On this passage in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, see Bohak (2008), 93, who considers the demonological interpretation to be the more probable. Bohak (2008), 107–108, also discusses the antidemonic hymns of 4Q510–511, which are a main subject of Eshel (1999). Some further Solomonic materials, including some in medieval transmission, are discussed in D. J. Halperin (1982), "The Book of Remedies, the Canonization of the Solomonic Writings, and the Riddle of Pseudo-Eusebius," *JQR* 72(4): 269–292.

who abode with him as his scholars, in order to learn the art of foretelling things to come.”¹³ This Judas is apparently the same person mentioned in *BJ* 1.78 as predicting the future. In addition, Josephus in *AJ* 15.373–376 remarks that Menahem the Essene was a renowned predictor of future events, whereas in *AJ* 17:346 an Essene called Simon is said to volunteer to interpret a dream to Archelaus.¹⁴ Viewed together, these instances show clearly that, among other things, future prediction seems to have been an Essene “specialty.” When the evidence of the school of foretelling founded by Judas is combined with Josephus’s mention of three Essene future predictors, one of whom was Judas himself, it seems to us quite appropriate to speak of a school or other social framework teaching “the art of foretelling things to come.” Whether this school exhibited other features of social organizations perpetuating secret knowledge is not evident from Josephus, but it is not unlikely. There must at least have been a teacher who had the information, some students aspiring to achieve the information, applicants desiring to enter the school, and presumably some way of deciding who would become a student and eventually an adept. Hierarchy and initiation seem implied.

3. *Temple-Related Skills.* We might also speculate plausibly that there were inner teachings connected with the priesthood and the temple, though they are not referred to explicitly before the destruction of 70 CE.¹⁵ It was previously mentioned that rabbinic

13. *AJ* 13.311. Of course, all this shows is that such an institution was known. It was not a secret secret society.

14. Cf. *AJ* 15:379. Essenes’ predictive activity is discussed to some extent in Samuel Thomas (2009), 193. On the meaning of “prophet” in Josephus, see Rebecca Gray (1993), *Prophetic Figures in Late Second Temple Jewish Palestine: The Evidence from Josephus* (New York: Oxford University Press).

15. See Chapter 2, §2.1, note 19. However, the priestly teaching of *ALD*, Chapters 7–10, shows that developed priestly traditions already existed in the late third or early second century BCE. *ALD* is far earlier than the traditions preserved in rabbinic literature, which relate to very specific elements of Temple cult. We can only guess by analogy whether further craft and other traditions existed that were secret.

literature records that various craft traditions relating to the Temple service were known only to specific priestly houses or families.¹⁶ Although these rabbinic sources postdate the Second Temple period, they may reflect earlier social realities in the Temple, in which case there must have been a developed tradition and teaching that also included Temple practice, which was transmitted within a fixed social context. Those eligible for admission to this knowledge were first and foremost members of certain priestly families. Whether all members of those priestly families, or only certain of them, were selected for initiation into the different corpora of special craft knowledge, and how that was done, remains unknown.

4. *Rigorous Sects in Rabbinic Literature.* Very soon after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, Saul Lieberman proposed that three of the groups referred to by Hegesippus as quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.22.7, be correlated with the Qumran covenanters on the one hand and with groups mentioned in early rabbinic literature on the other. Those three groups are the Essenes, Galileans, and Hemero-Baptists or "Morning Bathers."¹⁷

Lieberman connects the Essenes with the Qumran group, whereas he relates the Galileans and the Morning Bathers mentioned respectively by the Mishnah and the Tosefta to ultra-pious groups opposed by the rabbis. He quotes *t Yadaim* 2 [end] on the *Ṭovlê Šaḥarin* "Morning Bathers" who made very extreme purity demands of those mentioning the divine Name. In *m Yadaim* 4:8 a similar discussion with a Galilean heretic is recorded. These two groups, Galileans and Hemero-Baptists, he related to those mentioned by Hegesippus, and finds analogies in the Qumran sectarian law codes to their strict legal interpretations. He concludes that, "in the second century at the latest a Jewish heterodoxy

16. See Chapter 2, §2.1, note 20.

17. Saul Lieberman (1951), "Light on the Cave Scrolls from Rabbinic Sources," *PAAJR* 20: 395–404. He discusses Hegesippus's text on pp. 401–402.

was in existence which indulged in such acts of ultra-piety” (p. 402). It is not at all clear that these titles refer to different groups or that those groups existed before the destruction of the Second Temple, but that is quite possible. Moreover, we know nothing of their organization, admission procedures, and so forth. Despite similarities, therefore, we should be cautious in characterizing them as secret societies, though what is known of them is suggestive.

5. *Ḥāburôt*. Another line of research compares the propinquity of the Essenes (or only the Qumran group thereof) to the *Ḥāburôt* mentioned in rabbinic sources.¹⁸ In a fine survey of scholarship on the relationship of these two groups, Steven D. Fraade discusses the motivations and concerns of a number of the central scholarly figures who have promoted this connection in one or another form.¹⁹ His conclusion on p. 453 ends with the following cautionary words:

To the extent that all history is the history of its historians, then, as we have seen from our survey of the history of scholarship, the exercise of comparing ancient societies is fraught of necessity with our own confessional histories, which we cannot escape but can at least struggle to recognize. Perhaps the greatest value in juxtaposing the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls with that of early rabbinic Judaism—in exposing each to the light of the other—is to enable such intellectual self-recognition in comparative relief.

Fraade’s point is well taken. I would find it surprising to maintain that all the various groupings of Second Temple period Judaism just disappeared after 70 CE and those mentioned in rabbinic sources arose de

18. See Jacob Neusner (1963), *Fellowship in Judaism: The First Century and Today* (London: Valentine Mitchell), especially Chapter 2 (pp. 22–40) for a discussion of the duties of a member of a *Haburah*. This book is in a number of ways an outcome of social movements of the period in which it was written, but still of interest for our work.

19. Steven D. Fraade (2009). Lieberman’s article that forms his starting point is Saul Lieberman (1952).

novo. Perhaps, with the greater caution and self-reflection for which Fraade calls, we might still garner some data to fill out the historical picture of the Second Temple period.²⁰

I have not discussed the Hasideans in this book, nor the group called *Ḥāsîdîm rišonîm* in rabbinic sources. We do not even know whether they are identical.²¹ What comes to the fore in consideration of these groups, the *ḥabērîm*, the Hasideans (Assideans), and the *Ḥāsîdîm rišonîm*, is an emphasis on ritual purity. This is also a characteristic of the Qumran covenanters and is mentioned both by “insider” and “outsider” texts. Josephus (*AJ* 18:19) mentions the Essene stress on purity.²² Thus a concern for ritual purity seems to have been a major cause for some pious individuals to separate themselves from the general community. Apparently, the *Hāburôt* also had stages of initiation,²³ which is very suggestive when we think of the characteristics of secret societies discussed in the preceding chapters, but more cannot be said.

6. *Qumranite elements in Karaism*. Some of the distinctive Qumran sectarian language and concepts appear in early Karaite tradition.²⁴ That should perhaps be connected with the discovery of

20. The Boethusians were associated with the Sadducees and are witnessed in the first century BCE. In his entry, “Sects, Minor” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (2007) online = 18.232–233, Menahem Mansoor lists a number of other sects whose names were mentioned in ancient sources as late as Qirqisani, a tenth-century Karaite scholar, but about which there is very little information beyond the name. There were also Samaritan sects, of which the best known was the Dositheans. See also Marcel Simon (1967), *Jewish Sects at the Time of Jesus*, James H. Farley (trans.) (Philadelphia: Fortress), Chapter 4, 85–107. He discusses a number of groups, mainly those mentioned by Patristic authors, a number of which groups are the fruit of late inventions.

21. See on *Ḥasîdîm rišonîm*, the article by S. Safrai (1965), “The Teaching of Pietists in the Mishnaic Literature,” *JJS* 16: 15–33.

22. See Josephus (*AJ* 18:19), mentioning the Essene stress on purity. The insider information is discussed, for example, by Charlotte Hempel (2012).

23. Neusner (1963), 23–27.

24. See Chapter 4, §4.3, note 65. Naphtali Wieder first showed this to be the case. Wieder’s relevant book and articles are collected in Naphtali Wieder (2005). See in addition the remarks of Haggai Ben-Shammai in the Preface to that book.

a cave in the Qumran area in the eighth century or some other similar discovery that eventually made the *Damascus Document* available in the Cairo Geniza.²⁵ Saul Lieberman also suggested this connection between the Karaites and the Dead Sea Essene community, quoting a Rabbanite source that says that, “the heretic Anan and his friends used to write down heresies and lies and *hide them in the ground*. Then they would take them out and say: *This is what we found in ancient books*.” Thus, according to the Rabbanite tradition, the Karaites maintained that they found their teachings in ancient books that were hidden in the ground.²⁶ “If the theory about this finding is true, similarities in style between Karaite writings and the sectarian [*sic!*] documents

Further clear demonstrations of this connection can be found in Yoram Erder (2003), “‘The Prince Mastema’ in a Karaite Document,” *Meghillot*, 1: 243–246 (in Hebrew), who argues that the Karaites had access to the Hebrew text of *Jubilees*. He also argues that the “Sadducees” as described in Karaite sources is an invented group, to whom were attributed characteristics of the Qumran covenanters and the Sadducees. His monograph on this topic is Yoram Erder (2004), *Karaite Mourners of Zion and the Qumran Scrolls: History of an Alternative to Rabbinic Judaism* (Ḥayyim ben Hillel Library; Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad) in Hebrew; see particularly pp. 117–118.

25. See the discussion in Chapter 4, §4.3, note 69. Most likely the multiple ben Sira manuscripts found in the Geniza and the fragmentary copy of *ALD* discovered there also derived from some such find, though these Geniza manuscripts are mediaeval copies and not ancient originals. There have been attempts to identify other Geniza works, notably a hymnic manuscript and a wisdom text, as also deriving from some such ancient source. See David Flusser and Shmuel Safrai (2007), “The Apocryphal Psalms of David,” in David Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period: Qumran and Apocalypticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 258–282 and Klaus Berger (1989), *Die Weisheitsschrift aus der Kairoer Geniza: Erstedition, Kommentar und Übersetzung* (TAZNZ, 1; Tübingen, Germany: Francke).

26. See Lieberman (1951), 403. On the sect of the Maghariyya or “cave people,” mentioned in mediaeval sources, see John C. Reeves (1999), 161–162. Steven M. Wasserstrom (1997), “Šahrastānī on the Maḡāriyya,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 17: 127–154, discusses the sect in detail and concludes that this group did not have any direct connection with the Qumran covenanters. See further Yoram Erder (1998), “Remnants of Qumranic Lore in Two Laws of the Karaite Benjamin al-Nihawandi Concerning Desired Meat,” *Zion* 63: 5–38 (in Hebrew).

become both understandable and significant. And it is through the activity of the Karaites that parts of these documents came to the Geniza in Egypt, as correctly suggested by Prof. Kahle.”²⁷ At least, this strengthens the argument for a discovery of scrolls in the eighth century. However, as it stands, this state of affairs does not support nor does it contradict the persistence of groups known in the Second Temple period and their continuation during the first millennium CE. The case for that will have to be made on other grounds, if it can be made.²⁸ In particular, the works of Yoram Erder in recent years show that it is likely that a Qumranite stream fed into Karaism, and the traditions about discoveries in caves make it likely that it was through a discovery rather than through a continued transmission from antiquity.²⁹

6.1 INDICATIONS OF OTHER SECRET GROUPS

The preceding section was devoted to groups whose existence might be inferred from information drawn predominantly from historical writings such as those of Josephus and relating to distinct social groups, mostly named. The names of a number of groups are known, and the last preceding section aimed to clarify whether they have the character of secret societies. At least in the cases of guilds of magicians and exorcists this seemed probable. The same is true, to a certain extent at

27. Saul Lieberman (1951), 403.

28. See Martin Goodman (2011), “Religious Variety and the Temple in the Late Second Temple Period and Its Aftermath,” in Sacha Stern (ed.), *Sects and Sectarianism in Jewish History* (IJS Studies in Judaica, 12; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 21–37 and especially 33–36, whose remarks on the survival of groups known in the Second Temple period seem to me pertinent, though it is beyond our brief to follow the faded footsteps of such survivals.

29. See Erder (2003, 2004). His views are set forth fairly systematically in his later article: Yoram Erder (2014), “Understanding the Qumran Sect in View of Early Karaite Halakhah from the Geonic Period,” *RQ* 26: 403–423. His arguments are partly halachic and partly terminological and relate both to the report of Patriarch Timothy and to the “cave dwellers” known to the Qirqisani.

least, of the *Haburôt* who had a staged process of admission and inner grades of purity, though we know nothing of any tradition of *secret* lore or practice.³⁰ As for other named groups, our information does not suffice for any surmise to be made.³¹ In this section I turn to some literary sources from the Second Temple period in which “footprints” of secret knowledge or practice may be discerned, which may point to their transmission and study in secret groups.

The apocalypses are an obvious place to start, not least because they claim explicitly to have been passed down secretly from remote antiquity. In Chapter 2, I observed that in the ascent apocalypses, when the seer reaches the highest heaven and the peak of his revelatory experience, when he sees the face of God, when he receives the books from God’s treasury, or when he takes dictation from an angel, the information that is revealed to him is often recounted in a formulaic list of revealed things.³² Although I have already discussed these lists elsewhere, I recap the points central to the argument here. When I examined these lists, I saw that their teaching was not primarily about eschatological matters. Instead, they are catalogues of cosmological and cosmic secrets that include some temporal and eschatological elements.³³ I noted long ago the lack of fit between the subjects included in the lists and the contents of the visions attributed to the pseudonymous authors of the

30. See Neusner (1963); also John Bowker (1973), *Jesus and the Pharisees* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press), 35–37. A classic statement is in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* article, “Haber”: Solomon Schechter and S. Mendelsohn (1904), “Haber,” in Isidore Singer (ed.), *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls), 6.121–124.

31. Such are the Boethusians (a Jewish sect), the Dositheans (a Samaritan sect), etc. As for the Samaritans, no evidence survives that would put them within the ambit of the present study.

32. See Chapter 2, §2.3. These lists are discussed on pp. 414–452 in Stone (1976). This is reprinted in Stone (1991).

33. Chief examples may be found in 2 *Baruch* 48:2–9 (doxology), 59:5–11; 1 *Enoch* 41:3–7, 43:1–2, 60:11–13, 14–22, 91, 93:11–14 interrogative list; *LAB* 19:10, cf. 21:2; *Sibylline Oracles* 8.359–365 resemble these to a certain extent. 2 *Apocalypse of Baruch* 48:2–10 is a doxology that seems to incorporate a similar list. In Stone (1976) the variation of literary forms (lists, doxologies, questions) is discussed.

apocalypses.³⁴ I suggested that the apocalypses circulated widely in Jewish circles in the Second Temple period. Admittedly, it is difficult to prove from direct evidence that *all* apocalypses circulated thus, but it seems very likely that many of them did.³⁵

The present context now stimulates me to make the following hypothesis. Some, but not all, of those subjects that the lists say were revealed, but were not actually revealed in narratives of the apocalypses, are repeated in different works.³⁶ Thus they may be rooted in a tradition of some sort. Perhaps they were subjects of speculative knowledge in apocalyptic circles, but were kept secret except for their brief mention in the summary listings because the apocalyptic authors considered it inappropriate to describe them in detail, that is, because they were esoteric. Thus the authors created a tension between the lists and the revelations embedded in the apocalyptic narratives. The most likely explanation of this tension is that the apocalypses themselves were not truly esoteric, but their proclaimed esoteric transmission is actually a literary stratagem engaged in for various reasons,³⁷ such as to explain how the book survived or to enhance the book's authority. If this is indeed the case, we must distinguish between an inner, secret teaching, mentioned briefly in lists of revealed subjects, and the detailed revelations recounted in the apocalypses. The apocalypses were exoteric, though presented as if esoteric. We do not know the content of the inner knowledge and only the names of some of its categories, whereas the exoteric teaching of the apocalypses circulated quite widely.³⁸

34. This might suggest that some of the lists may be taken from preexistent literary or oral documents. Nonetheless, the subjects in the lists are enumerated as the contents of the high point of God's apocalyptic revelation to the seer: See Stone, "Lists of Revealed Things," 383–384 and 399–400.

35. The very fact that they were preserved in Christian traditions is, in fact, an indication of that.

36. The demonstration of this is set forth in Stone (1976).

37. This issue overlaps with that of apocalyptic pseudepigraphy and many of the arguments advanced in that connection bear on the issue discussed here. See the discussion in Chapter 2, §2.3 and in Chapter 6, §6.2.

38. Karen L. King (2012), talking of the function of historical apocalypses, remarks justly that they claim to communicate secret predictions, *vaticinia ex*

Here I open my discussion of more detailed evidence for the hypothesis that some apocalypses exhibit familiarity with secret knowledge yet that knowledge is not expressed in their overt contents. To start, we again consider 4 *Ezra* (late first century CE). Three points emerge from this book that support our claim.

First, in the early chapters of the book, by means of a series of riddle questions, Ezra's angelic interlocutor deflects his questions about the incomprehensibility of the divine management of the world.³⁹ Basically the angel's argument is that Ezra cannot understand the heavenly secrets because he is an earthly being (4 *Ezra* 4:20). Thus this passage functions as a denial of the ability to know what is beyond our ken.

eventu (p. 88). It is her next sentence that is problematic to me: "The actual readership of the texts is thus a special elect group who through the predictions are advised to recognize their crucial place in the history of the world"; see also p. 75. The argument adduced to show that the readers are "a special elect group" is derived from the prescriptions in the framework story about secret transmission. As we have remarked, these books, the Jewish apocalypses, circulated widely and were even translated into Greek. The framework stories, like the pseudepigraphical authors, are part of a strategy of authentication.

39. 4 *Ezra* 4:5 I said, "Speak on, my lord." And he said to me,

"Go, weigh for me the weight of fire,
or measure for me a measure of wind,
or call back for me the day that is past."

4:6 I answered and said, "Who of those that have been born can do this,
that you ask me concerning these things?"

4:7 And he said to me, "If I had asked you,
How many dwellings are in the heart of the sea,
or how many springs are at the source of the deep,
or how many ways are above the firmament,
or which are the exits of hell,
or which are the entrances of paradise?

4:8 perhaps you would have said to me,
'I never went down into the deep,
nor as yet did I descend into hell,
nor did I ever ascend into heaven,
nor did I enter Paradise.'

Similar material is to be found in 2 *Apocalypse of Baruch* 14:8–9 and cf.

21:18, 48:46.

The text implies clearly that such knowledge exists, but that humans cannot readily achieve it. Elsewhere I have noted that the apocalypses are conscious of the limited nature of normal human sight and understanding.⁴⁰ 1 *Enoch* says, in praise of its hero, that Enoch heard and understood all the words of the watchers, the highest class of angels (1:2).⁴¹

40. Concerning Enoch, we observed that his faculties were transformed in the course of his angelification: See, e.g., 1 *Enoch* 12:1–2. See also 2 *Enoch* 22:6–11 and the remark in 2 *Enoch* 39:3–7. See further, Michael E. Stone (2018 forthcoming), “Enoch’s Revelations,” *The Enochic Chronotope*, F. Badalanova Geller (ed.). Dan Merkur’s comment about shamanic initiation, in the course of which the shaman’s body is deconstructed, reconstructed, and turned into illumination, is intriguing: Daniel Merkur (1992), 136. It is surely notable that 4 *Ezra* does not relate a heavenly ascent of the seer, but mentions that it will take place in the future, and it is mentioned in the last verse of the book (14:50, and see 14:9). This fits with his denial of such special knowledge in 4:7–12, with the limitation laid on Ezra’s vision and hearing in the revelation context in 10:55–56, and Ezra’s translation after death on the other (14:50). Jonathan Z. Smith speaks of the “angelicizing” of the adept in *Prayer of Joseph*; see in James H. Charlesworth (ed.) (1985), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday), 2.704. See in general *Prayer of Joseph*, Frag. A1. In PGM 2.148.1–149.28 in a Jewish papyrus, the petitioner says that he is “an angel on earth.” In the Mani Codex, in a quote from an apocalypse, Sethel says that he “became like one of the greatest angels”: Ron Cameron and Arthur J. Dewey (1979), *The Cologone Mani Codex* (P. Colon. inv. nr. 4780) “Concerning the Origin of his Body” (SBLTT, 15, Early Christian Literature Series, 3; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press), 51.4 = pp. 38–39. These texts are discussed by Martha Himmelfarb (1991), “Revelation and Rapture: The Transformation of the Visionary in the Ascent Apocalypses,” in John J. Collins and James H. Charlesworth (eds.), *Mysteries and Revelations: Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Symposium* (JSPSup, 9; Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press), 79–90. Compare also 1 *Enoch* 104:2–6 and *Ascension of Isaiah* 8:5, 17. See Himmelfarb (1991), 82, on Seth(el) and pp. 82–84 on Enoch in 2 *Enoch* 22. John C. Reeves (1996), 5–6, discusses the Mani Codex, and in the same work, he investigates the apocryphal apocalypses cited by it. The Sethel (Seth) quotation is analyzed and discussed on pp. 111–140.

41. 1 *Enoch* 14:2. See Stone (2018 forthcoming), “Enoch’s Revelations.” Charlotte Hempel (2013), 236 says that “both the Scrolls and the Visions of the book of Daniel alongside other early Jewish texts such as 1 *Enoch* reflect a self-understanding characterized by a close relationship of some kind with the angelic realm.”

Second, 4 *Ezra* vigorously denies human ability to know celestial things earlier in the book, and later, in apparent contradiction of that denial, the visionary receives the revelation of the Heavenly Jerusalem. At the end of this Jerusalem vision and his explanation of its meaning, the angel commands Ezra thus:

10:55 Therefore do not be afraid, and do not let your heart be terrified; but go in and see the splendour and vastness of the building as far as it is possible for your eyes to see it,

10:56 and afterward you will hear as much as your ears can hear.

10:57 For you are more blessed than many, and you have been named before the Most High, as but few have been.

This promise is not fulfilled in 4 *Ezra*; Ezra's entry into the Heavenly Jerusalem is not described, and what he was able to see and hear is not reported in the text. The formula relating to hearing and seeing is a clear indication that Ezra's human organs of sight and hearing could not encompass all that was to be found in the wondrous heavenly city of Jerusalem that he was commanded to enter.⁴² Although the

42. Michael E. Stone (2007), "The City in 4th Ezra," *JBL* 126(2): 402–407. Compare the formulation in 1 Corinthians 2:9: "But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him'"—and this refers to a divine wisdom, "secret and hidden" (2:7). 1 Corinthians 2:9 has been attributed to an apocryphal Jewish Elijah work; see Michael E. Stone and John Strugnell (1979), *The Books of Elijah, Parts 1 and 2* (SBLTT 18; PS 8; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press), 42–73. Note the reemployment of this phrase in *LAB* 26:13. It is intriguing that almost no previous scholars have drawn attention to the statement in 4 *Ezra*, an oversight that must be a result of the type of questions they are posing to this apocalypse. Some of its aspects were mentioned by Carla Sulzbach (2012), "When Going on a Heavenly Journey, Travel Light and Dress Appropriately," *JSP* 19(3): 163–193, especially 174–175. Note the description of Asenath's heavenly place of rest in "the highest, and her walls like adamantine eternal walls, and her foundations founded upon a rock of the seventh heaven." This evokes 4 *Ezra*'s heavenly city. Compare the formulation in Ephrem's Syrus' remark quoted on p. 34.

framework story indicates that Ezra's status had risen, he had not yet achieved heavenly ascent or angelification.⁴³

The incomplete fulfillment of this angelic promise and the absence of any description of what the visionary saw is somewhat analogous to enumerating a summary list of subjects revealed, but not setting them forth in the detailed narrative of the revelatory experience. I have proposed that 4 *Ezra* 10:55–57 is based on an esoteric understanding of the heavenly Jerusalem as a metaphor for the presence of God that may be compared to the Palace and Chariot metaphors for the Divinity in the Jewish Hekhalot and Merkabah mystical literature. The emphasis on Ezra's being blessed and on his admission into the mystery, yet his inability to comprehend it completely ("as far as it is possible for your eyes to see . . . as much as your ears can hear") clearly indicates both heavenly or mystical secrets and Ezra's earthly status.⁴⁴

In 4 *Ezra* 14 the seer underwent a "Moses-like" revelatory experience, a new "Sinai event" during which he received books from heaven. That new revelation to Ezra is based on the revelation to Moses, for the Torah is said to have been burnt at the time of the Babylonian Exile.⁴⁵ He receives not five, but ninety-four books. At the end of this experience the text says:

14:45 The Most High spoke to me, saying, "Make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; 14:46 but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people.

14:47 For in them are the springs of understanding, the fountains of wisdom and the river of knowledge."

14:48 And I did so.

43. Stone (2018 forthcoming), "Enoch's Revelations" and the Jewish Hellenistic *Prayer of Jacob*, especially fragment 1A. C.R.A. Morray-Jones (1992), "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition," *JJS* 43(1): 1–31, especially pp. 12–15, discusses Moses's transformation, among others, according to a number of later sources.

44. See note 42 in this section.

45. Stone (1990), 410–411.

The twenty-four exoteric books are those of the Hebrew Bible, whereas the seventy secret books are not clearly characterized, though they are said to have saving power. It nowhere says that 4 *Ezra* itself is part of the seventy secret books to be given to the “wise among your people” (14:46). The wise presumably preserved and transmitted them, though that is not made explicit.

The idea of writing visions in a book and giving them to the wise is also found in 4 *Ezra* 12. The seer receives a dream interpretation from an angel and the angel concludes thus:

12:36 And you alone were worthy to learn this secret of the Most High.

12:37 Therefore write all these things that you have seen in a book, and put it in a hidden place;

12:38 and you shall teach them to the wise among your people, whose hearts you know are able to comprehend and keep these secrets.

See 13:53–55. In this passage Ezra writes the secret in a book, gives it to the wise, who are said to hide it and to be “able to comprehend and keep these secrets.”⁴⁶ Such statements do not enhance the verisimilitude of the book of 4 *Ezra* itself, for it was in fact widely known.

4 *Ezra*’s denial of human capability to know the suprahuman is in general reminiscent of a statement by ben Sira (ca. 300 years earlier):

SIR. 3: 21 Neither seek what is too difficult for you,
nor investigate what is beyond your power.

3: 22 Reflect upon what you have been commanded,
for what is hidden is not your concern.⁴⁷

46. See Stone (1990) on 4 *Ezra* 14:46. I commented on all this in Michael E. Stone (2014), “Seeing and Understanding in 4 *Ezra*,” in John Ashton (ed.), *Revealed Wisdom: Studies in Apocalyptic in Honour of Christopher Rowland* (AJEC, 88; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 122–137, especially p. 123.

47. Moshe S. Segal (1958), *Sefer Ben-Sira Ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute), in Hebrew, compares this passage with *b Hagiga* 13a (p. 18). That Talmudic

Scholars have differed radically as to the referent of this admonition. Some have taken Sir 3:21–22 to mean that the wise man is to busy himself only with the things of this world.⁴⁸ Others have understood these verses as polemically directed against the study of Greek philosophy.⁴⁹ In view of the subject matter of this section, we should consider whether Ben Sira's statement reflects a general view that that which is beyond human bounds is incomprehensible or whether here he is opposing a distinct tradition of esoteric or hidden knowledge.⁵⁰ Samuel Thomas puts his view as follows: "Ben Sira, for example, famously embraces

passage refers to forbidden heavenly secrets and cites the ben Sira verses in support. Rabbinic literature also cites the same passage from ben Sira elsewhere, sometimes in textually variant forms. See G. H. Box and W. O. E. Oesterley, "Sirach," in R. H. Charles (ed.), *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 1.326. Note the remarks on this by Ithamar Gruenwald (2014), *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism, Second, Revised Edition*, (AJEC, 90; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 57–58. David Flusser, already in 1997, wrote an important and perceptive article on Deuteronomy 29:29 and *Ben Sira* 3:21–24, reprinted as David Flusser (2007).

48. Gerhard von Rad (1972), *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville, TN & New York: Abingdon), 292–294, remarks on mysteries that the wisdom books thought unknowable. Martin Hengel also approaches this material in a nonmystical fashion and would interpret this passage as being opposed to "false 'striving for wisdom'": See Martin Hengel (1974), *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress), 1.139–40. Similarly, Pancratius C. Beentjes (2012), "What about Apocalypticism in the Book of Ben Sira?," in Martti Nissinen (ed.), *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010* (VTSup, 148; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 207–227, sets forth the various views of this passage clearly, himself opting to interpret it as meaning, "that the disciples are incited to confine themselves to what has been revealed in the Torah" (214). From *Ben Sira* 43:32–33 he infers that "a special group of persons, viz. the pious, are given wisdom so that they catch a glimpse of God's works of creation" (pp. 214–215).

49. Benjamin G. Wright III (2005), "Putting the Puzzle Together: Some Suggestions Concerning the Social Location of the Wisdom of Ben Sira," in Benjamin G. Wright and Lawrence M. Wills (eds.), *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism* (SBL Symposium Series, 35; Atlanta, GA: SBL), 89–112. On p. 97 he discusses this view, with which he does not agree.

50. Annette Yoshiko Reed (2015), "Enoch, Eden, and the Beginnings of Jewish Cosmography," *The Cosmography of Paradise: the Other World from Ancient Mesopotamia to Medieval Europe* (Warburg Institute Colloquia, missing 27; 67–94, especially 89–90) remarks on this view both in the contemporary context of the

the study and contemplation of prior revelation as it is enshrined in scriptural texts (Sir 1, 24) while shunning the pursuit of matters hidden or otherwise unseen (Sir 3:21–24).⁵¹ Thomas's view expressed in this quotation is less specific than that of Benjamin Wright. Basing himself on the words פלאות [wonders] and נסתרות [hidden/secret things,] that Ben Sira uses, Wright argues, "while the 'secret things' could refer to hidden aspects of creation, they almost certainly refer as well to matters of past and future."⁵² He avoids a categorical assertion, but puts these aspects of knowledge into the context of the religious thought of Ben Sira's time. If we accept this view at least, it is clear that in ben Sira's days there were already areas of knowledge that were considered inappropriate for public discourse.⁵³ However, we still cannot be certain that ben Sira referred to secret realms of knowledge.

David Flusser, in a very perceptive article, foreshadowed our argument in connecting the verses in Deuteronomy 29:29 and Ben Sira 3:21–22.⁵⁴ He argues from this connection to the "partially esoteric" nature of the Qumran sect's teachings.⁵⁵ What is beyond doubt is that

early Enochic writings and in its reassertion of "the values of the Pentateuch and the biblical Wisdom tradition in the face of the apocalyptic innovations of the early Hellenistic age." She discusses attitudes to the special knowledge of the cosmos and of mythical geography, as they contrast with the views of Deuteronomy and *Ben Sira*.

51. Thomas (2009), 95.

52. Wright (2005), 98. 1Q27 frag. 1, col. 1, in a description of the cutting off of knowledge by the wicked, says, "they do not know the mystery that is to be [*raz nihyeh*], nor understand ancient matters. And they do not know what is going to happen to them; and they will not save their souls from the mystery that is to be" (translation based on *Study Edition*). This almost exactly inverts ben Sira's prohibitions. Wickedness will prevent the achieving of the sorts of knowledge ben Sira forbids. Note that I accept the translation of the much-debated *raz nihyeh* as "mystery that is to be" as a working hypothesis in the specific context of 1Q27, where the eschatological dimension is significant: see also Daniel J. Harrington (2003). On p. 345 he argues that "the mystery that is to come" is an apocalyptic concept.

53. See also David Flusser (2007), 295.

54. He argues that Ben Sira was, in turn, based on a reading of Psalm 19:12 reading the word *šgy'wt* "errors" as if it were the consonantly identical *saggyot*, i.e., "elevated matters." This seems to me to be possible, but not necessary for his argument.

55. Flusser (2007), 294.

once such traditions of esoteric knowledge did circulate, Ben Sira 3:21–22 could be read to refer to secret knowledge and could be viewed as a close parallel to 4 *Ezra*’s statements three centuries later.⁵⁶ And so the rabbinic Sages read it.

6.2 STATUS AND THE PSEUDO-ESOTERIC

That special or secret knowledge existed in Ben Sira’s time is clear from the earliest Enoch literature, which is earlier than or contemporary with ben Sira.⁵⁷ When we examined Enoch’s status according to the Enochic *Book of the Watchers*, we learned that only after his angelification could his organs of sight and hearing encompass the heavenly sights and speech.⁵⁸ So this third-century BCE work also stresses that ordinary humans cannot see and hear the heavenly. In 1 *Enoch* 19:3, in one of a number of similar statements, he says, “I, Enoch, saw the visions, the extremities of all things. And no one among humans has

56. Thus it is cited in rabbinic literature: see note 47 in this section.

57. Of course, the extent and character of traditions of secret knowledge in the second century BCE are not fully known. See also Thomas (2009), 95–96, and Shani Tzoref (2010), 299–303.

58. See §6.1, note 40, Stone (2014), and idem. Michael E. Stone (2018 forthcoming), “Enoch’s Revelations,” *The Enochic Chronotope*, F. Badalanova Geller (ed.). Martha Himmelfarb, referring to 1 *Enoch* 14, remarks in a perceptive and intriguing comment, “[i]n the book of the watchers, Enoch is overcome by fear at the awesome majesty of the heavenly temple, yet God welcomes him and speaks to him without requiring any purification or change in his physical being.” This is indeed unusual, and when we consider Isaiah 6, not to speak of the statements elsewhere in *The Book of the Watchers*, it is even more surprising. See Martha Himmelfarb (1993), 29. The transformation in 2 *Enoch* is, *pace* Himmelfarb (1993), 45–46, an angelification and not his becoming “a kind of priest.” See further her remarks on pp. 48–50. This is quite explicit in 2 *Enoch* 22:8–10. In the *Ascension of Isaiah* 8:17, Isaiah’s praise, or according to the Latin, his *gloria*, becomes like that of the angels: See also *Ascension of Isaiah* 8:15. In 1 *Enoch* 39:2 Enoch’s task of blessing and praise is the same as the angels’ (39.12–14); cf. *Prayer of Joseph* (Charlesworth *OTP* 2.702) and see also PGM 2.148, 1–149 28. On angelification in the *Apocalypse of Sethel*, see Reeves (1996), 119, and his development of this on pp. 121–122. See §6.1, note 40.

seen as I saw.”⁵⁹ Benjamin G. Wright has discerned in *Jubilees* an analogous relationship between revelation and status. He says that “a synergistic relationship obtained between the characters in *Jubilees* and their worthiness to receive laws derived from the heavenly tablets and then to transmit them.”⁶⁰ Moreover, by the time of *Jubilees*’ composition, the coming together of the sapiential and speculative traditions in the apocalypses is already well underway.⁶¹

The passage from Ben Sira previously cited continues:

Sir. 3:23 Do not meddle in matters that are beyond you,
for *more than you can understand* has been shown you. [emphasis mine]

This speaks of the revelation to Ben Sira of more than his mind can comprehend, and again seems to foreshadow 4 *Ezra* 10:55–56 and contrasts with Enoch’s ability stressed in 1 *Enoch* 1:2. When we consider the possible intentions of the Ben Sira passage it is well to bear in mind that parts of 1 *Enoch* and *Aramaic Levi Document* precede it in date. So the interpretation maintaining that Ben Sira prohibits seeking revelations of secret knowledge cannot be excluded on chronological grounds.⁶²

59. The Sethel apocalypse in the Mani Codex says, “When I heard these things, my heart rejoiced, and my understanding was changed, and I became like one of the greatest angels.” See Cameron and Dewey (1979), 38–39 = CMC 51.1–6. In the Enochic *Similitudes*, the seer sees “all visions of what is hidden” (52:1, cf. 37:4) and in 64:2–11 angels reveal secrets to him. Already in 19:3, Enoch had stressed that, “no-one has seen as I saw.” Similarly, the introduction to the Apocalypse of Weeks in 1 *Enoch* 93:1–2, stresses that Enoch understood what he saw.

60. Benjamin G. Wright III (2009), “Jubilees, Sirach, and Sapiential Tradition,” in Gabriele Boccaccini and Giovanni Ibba (eds.), *Enoch and the Mosaic Torah: The Evidence of Jubilees* (Grand Rapids, MI, & Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans), 116–130, 127.

61. See the end of §3.1 in Chapter 3.

62. See Wright (2005), 89–112. He deals with this passage of *Ben Sira* on 96–100, viewing it as reflecting opposition to apocalyptic interest in heavenly and cosmic secrets. Wright also analyzes Ben Sira’s attitude to ascents and visions on pp. 100–102. Clearly, he takes the knowledge that Ben Sira opposes as that evident in roughly contemporary or older apocalypses such as *Book of the Watchers*, *Aramaic Levi Document*, and *The Book of the Luminaries*, thus basically agreeing with the tendency of my own thinking here.

As I previously remarked, this passage (Ben Sira 3:21–23), might be understood in a nonportentous way: Devote your attention to whatever you can understand, do not overreach your human capacities. I hesitate to decide, in terms of our present knowledge of its context in Judea around 190 BCE, between such an interpretation and one that discerns here realms of esoteric or revealed knowledge that are forbidden on the one hand but potentially revealed on the other. The interpretation of 4 *Ezra*, which was written 300 years later, is of course unambiguous on this count, referring to esoteric or revealed knowledge.

A second point further supports 4 *Ezra*'s familiarity with secret knowledge. It was shown elsewhere that in two places 4 *Ezra* seems to draw on or refer to a tradition of mystical or allegorical exegesis of Song of Songs, a work that frequently provided a basis for mystical contemplation in a time not much later than 4 *Ezra*.⁶³ Yet the particular exegetical tradition of Song of Songs that 4 *Ezra* knew is otherwise unattested, indeed unique.⁶⁴ Of course, it is not surprising that in the last decade of the first century CE an allegorical and potentially mystical interpretation of Song of Songs was current or that a reference to it made its way into an apocalyptic writing. The connections between the two bodies of writing, the apocalyptic literature and early Jewish mystical traditions cannot be doubted.⁶⁵ Here, we will not enter into

63. See Michael E. Stone (2006b), "The Interpretation of Song of Songs in 4 *Ezra*," *JSJ* 38(2): 226–233. One might also remark on the early midrashic material on Song of Songs published by Saul Lieberman (1960), "Mishnat Shir Ha-Shirim," in Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary), 118–126, in Hebrew; Morray-Jones (1992), 1–31, especially p. 2. In addition to the preceding work, see Judah Goldin (1988b), "Towards a Profile of the Tanna, Aqiba ben Joseph," in idem., Barry L. Eichler, and Jeffery H. Tigay (eds.), *Studies in Midrash and Related Literature* (Philadelphia, New York, & Jerusalem: JPS), 299–323. Goldin deals with Akiba's special reverence of Song of Songs on pages 306–307.

64. Stone (2006b). In the following discussion I take a clear stand on this contentious issue.

65. This is a main thesis of Gruenwald (2014), following Gershom G. Scholem (1960), *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: JTS). This connection has been disputed. Scholem died in 1982 and

the discussion about Tannaitic mysticism, except to note that 4 *Ezra* is to be dated shortly before 100 CE and R. Akiba was a contemporary of 4 *Ezra*. R. Akiba's saying quoted in *m Yadaim* 3.5 that "all the Bible is holy but Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies" is intriguing when laid alongside 4 *Ezra*. R. Akiba also features in the tradition of "Four who entered the *pardes*" in *b Haggigah* 14b.⁶⁶ His dictum about Song of Songs implies, in my view, a nonliteral reading of the book. What is striking, however, is that neither the specific exegetical tradition of Song of Songs used by 4 *Ezra* nor 4 *Ezra*'s use of Jerusalem as a metaphor for the Godhead that is discussed in §2.3 can to be found in contemporary rabbinic or early Jewish mystical witnesses. In summary, the riddle questions, the mystical understanding of the heavenly Jerusalem, and the exegetical tradition attached to Song of Songs, constitute three traditions of hidden knowledge to which 4 *Ezra* alludes that we have been able to identify.

In addition to these allusions to otherwise unknown traditions, we have also noted three points at which 4 *Ezra* talks explicitly of the existence of esoteric traditions, the content of which he does not set forth. These are the following: (1) in Ezra's seventh vision, the Torah revelation in Chapter 14, and elsewhere in the book a dual revelation of exoteric and esoteric writings or knowledge is mentioned explicitly.

in 1986 his stance was challenged by Peter Schäfer (1986), *Gershom Scholem Reconsidered: The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism. The Twelfth Sacks Lecture* (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies), without, of course, his enormous contribution being denied. The question of the antiquity of the Merkabah and Hekhalot literature is not germane to our argument here. What is, is that the work of Ithamar Gruenwald and, in a different way, that of Andrei Orlov, has shown connections between the apocalyptic and mystical texts. R. Akiba's name in *b Haggiga* 14b is connected with an ascent vision the terminology and type of which have old roots: see Gruenwald (2014), 23–28. Song of Songs doubtless was read allegorically, as the material assembled by S. Lieberman in Scholem (1960) makes evident; see note 63 in this section. The discussion in *m Yadaim* 3.5 about its standing as scripture seems also to witness (at least by implication) the victory of a nonliteral reading. The Mishnah dates the start of this discussion back to the generation following the destruction in 70 CE.

66. See the preceding note.

Esoteric revelations to Abraham (3:14) and Moses (14:3–6)⁶⁷ are mentioned alongside the well-known biblical revelations of Genesis 15 and Exodus 19, respectively. The double revelation to Ezra of esoteric and exoteric books, which is related in 4 *Ezra* 14:37–48, logically continues this pattern.⁶⁸ Moreover, it is by no means certain that 4 *Ezra* itself should be reckoned among the esoteric books.⁶⁹ (2) A tradition of secret transmission is invoked to explain how the book of 4 *Ezra* itself reached the reader's time (e.g., in 12:37–39), comparable to similar strategies used in Daniel 12, Revelation 22, and other apocalypses.⁷⁰

67. A similar list of recipients of revelation occurs in 2 *ApBar* 4:5, “4 And after these things I showed it to My servant Abraham by night among the portions of the victims. 5 And again also I showed it to Moses on Mount Sinai when I showed to him the likeness of the tabernacle and all its vessels.” This refers to a heavenly Jerusalem/temple.

68. Florentino García Martínez (2007), 160–161, where he compares the secret instruction in the laws of the Qumran sect with the secret revelations to Abraham, Moses, and Ezra according to 1QS 8:15–16 and 4 *Ezra*, particularly 4 *Ezra* 14. Frances Flannery-Dailey (2012), remarks well that the narrative in Chapter 14 also differentiates the language and solutions directed to the two distinct groups, the “wise” and the people (p. 68).

69. I have come to question my own prior view, expressed in Stone (1990), 441, that the esoteric books resembled (and implicitly included) 4 *Ezra*. García Martínez (2007), 153–167, especially pages 160–162 discusses the issue of double revelation. He suggests that: “[i]n Qumran, we find a similar concept of the Torah; in Qumran also the Torah has a public component and a secret component, reserved for members of the sect . . . we can find it in the distinction between the גלות and the נסתר of the Torah in the Qumran writings” (160–161). Aharon Shemesh suggests that there was a similar distinction in community *halakhah* between revealed and hidden commandments, saying: “The revealed ones are those set out in the Torah; the hidden commandments were unknown until revealed to the members of the sect.” See Aharon Shemesh, (2002), “Expulsion and Exclusion in the Community Rule and the Damascus Document,” *DSD* 9(1): 44–74, especially pp. 48–49 and 54–55. On גלות and the נסתר, see Tzoref (2010). This interpretation might be supported by *Jubilees* 1, especially the title and 1:26, cf. 4:19. See Michael A. Knibb (2012), “Enoch and Wisdom: Reflections on the Character of the Book of Parables,” in Martti Nissinen (ed.), *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010* (VTSup, 148; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 255–276, especially 263–266.

70. See, for example, 1 *Enoch* 82:1, 92:1; 2 *Enoch* 33:5–12, 35, 54:1–2, 68:2; and *Testament of Moses*, Chapter 1. In 2 *Enoch* 54:1, interestingly, we read about

(3) At the end of Chapter 10, if my understanding is correct, 4 *Ezra* uses the metaphor of Jerusalem to foretell an ascent to the Divinity and mentions human inability completely to comprehend this visionary revelation. Early in the book, as we have already seen, mention of varied forms of esoteric learning combines with the denial of human ability to achieve heavenly knowledge.

I think therefore that we must consider the possibility that the apocalypses and certain of the wisdom books used language hinting at the existence of inner, secret traditions of various sorts. Such traditions are part of “revealed wisdom.” They are not coextensive with the contents of the apocalypses, though they overlap with them.⁷¹ I suggest that, in such instances, as in the case of the lists of revealed things that set forth “subject headings” of speculations but not their actual content, these hints too have a real basis in esoteric speculation. Their inclusion in the apocalypses serves to evoke mystification in those who do not know the inner teaching and to evoke that inner teaching in those who do know it.⁷² Such an impact doubtless strengthened the truth claim of the apocalypses.

the books transmitted to Enoch’s descendants, “The books which I have given to you do not hide them. To all who wish, recite them. . . .” See also both recensions of 2 *Enoch* 33:8–10 and Chapter 36 especially strongly in recension J. See Seth L. Sanders’ remarks on ALD, and the Qahat and Amram texts when he says that they “present a picture of a father-to-son transmission of esoteric ritual knowledge”; Seth L. Sanders (2017 forthcoming), *From Adapa to Enoch: Scribal Culture and Religious Vision in Judea and Babylon*. (TSAJ, 167, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 159. In Pirke de R. Eliezer, Chapter 8, there is a genealogy of the transmission of “the secret of the calendar [*ibbur*]” from Adam, through the ante- and post-diluvium worthies: See also Annette Yoshiko Reed (2007), 482–483.

71. I have in mind as examples *Ben Sira* 3:21–23 and Wisdom of Solomon, particularly Chapter 7, which passages are discussed in this chapter, 1. *Magicians and Exorcists* and in notes 12 and 31. When 1 *Enoch* 93:10 speaks of the revelation of “sevenfold wisdom and knowledge,” it is an example of sapiential language, and another is the wisdom passage in 1 *Enoch* 42.

72. I hesitate to endorse another explanation according to which such hints are so much a part of the apocalyptic speculative tradition that references to them “sneak into” the apocalypses with no particular intent.

In addition, the following point is significant. Ezra in *4 Ezra* is in a different status to Enoch in the *Book of the Watchers*. Enoch starts with a suprahuman role and, as I have pointed out, there are repeated references to his ability to absorb and understand the affairs of the Watchers and heavenly realities.⁷³ Moreover, Enoch is taken to heaven, most significantly in Chapter 14, and his heavenly status is suggested and confirmed by an exegesis of “walked with God” in Genesis 5:22–24. Hindy Najman has suggested a particularly insightful understanding of *4 Ezra*, which is centrally based on the “prophetization” of Ezra, though she does not use quite that word. She traces how Ezra was emptied of his prior assumptions and then began to act as a prophet in Vision 4, which process is completed by Vision 7. Najman’s metaphor “emptied” is particularly apposite. In 4:11 Ezra is indeed told that his “vessel” cannot comprehend the way of the Most High; in 7:25 he is told, “Therefore, Ezra, empty things are for the empty, and full things are for the full,” and in 14:37–42 his drinking a full goblet of inspiration is described.⁷⁴ We remarked that his assumption is narrated only after the Torah revelation in Chapter 14, which is the climax of his prophetization.⁷⁵ This implies that throughout the book Ezra’s status and the nature of the revelation to him are not heavenly. So *4 Ezra* 4:21 says explicitly that “those who dwell upon the earth can understand only what is on the earth, and he who is above the heavens can understand what is above the height of the heavens.” The repeated “as far as” in 10:55–57, indicating the limitation of Ezra’s abilities, is to be understood in light of this.⁷⁶ The limits on his abilities are removed in 14:50, in which he becomes a prophetic heavenly scribe. The relationship between status and function and between status and the type of visionary experience that I proposed some time ago is absolutely clear in light of this overall understanding of the book.⁷⁷ Ezra’s revelations

73. Stone (2018 forthcoming), “Enoch’s Revelations.”

74. See Hindy Najman (2012), 319–320.

75. Najman (2012).

76. See discussion in §6.1

77. Stone, (in press), “Enoch’s Revelations”; note also how Najman’s proposal fits with the analysis in Stone (2014).

that are set forth in the book reflect his growth as a prophet and touch on the course of history. He becomes a heavenly being only in the last verses of the book, and what he learned and experienced after that transformation is not described.⁷⁸

The discussion in the preceding paragraphs still leaves one issue open, and it is not certain that it can be resolved. Do traditions like those about Enoch and Ezra transmitting their books to their own descendants or to a chosen group of followers reflect any social reality? Was there really a group (or groups) of the “wise among the people” who nurtured books of revelation (4 *Ezra* 14:46)? If such groups existed, did these apocalypses constitute their esoteric teachings, which subsequently became exoteric?⁷⁹ Of course, if such secret groups indeed existed, then transmission of secrets to groups of the wise, which is mentioned by various apocalypses, might be even more convincing as an authority-seeking strategy, as it reflected a social reality known to

78. It is intriguing that the three later Ezra apocalypses published by O. Wahl (1977), *Apocalypsis Esdrae*, *Apocalypsis Sedrach*, *Visio Beati Esdrae* (PVTG, 4; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill) do deal precisely with the heavens and the underworld and Ezra's or the deceased soul's ascent or its descent into Tartarus, as also does *Questions of Ezra*.

79. Stone (1990), 42, 428–431, and earlier in Michael E. Stone (1984), “Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, Michael E. Stone (ed.), (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum Ad Novum Testamentum 2.2; Assen and Philadelphia: van Gorcum and Fortress), 431–434. David Flusser (1953), in an article on the “The Apocryphal Book of *Ascensio Isaiae* and the Dead Sea Sect,” *IEJ* 3:30–47 suggested, rather plausibly, that the description of the life of the prophet Isaiah and his disciples, together with his ecstatic experiences, as they are described in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, largely reflect features of the way of life of the Dead Sea Sect. This is perhaps too specific a conclusion, in light of our increased knowledge of the sect. However, to develop Flusser's insight, that description might well reflect the life of some group gathered around a visionary leader. Of course, it would be rash to generalize from the two specific cases of 4 *Ezra* and *Ascension of Isaiah*. On Isaiah's visionary experience, see also the remarks of Jonathan Knight (1995), *Ascension of Isaiah* (Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press), 67, and compare the strikingly similar description of a vision experience given in *LAB* 28:6, relating to Cenez = Kenaz (father of the judge Othniel). In *LAB*, however, the social ramifications of the trance are not described. Knight, it seems to me, seeks to minimize the

the audience. We have too little information about the apocalypses' social function, however, to resolve this question. Moreover, it is by no means certain even that all the ancient Jewish apocalypses functioned in the same way; they were not all written in the same social situation, at the same time, or in the same language. I have made some preliminary remarks on this issue in Chapter 7, §7.1, in the course of dealing with tripartite social organization.⁸⁰

A number of years ago I concluded that it is impossible with the data available today to uncover the social context and function of the apocalyptic literature.⁸¹ The discovery of secret traditions within the apocalypses does not invalidate this conclusion, though the tension between revelation and hiding, between open knowledge and hidden secrets, brings us more fully to realize how complex is the question of the function of the apocalypses. One outcome of the foregoing discussion, however, is that we may conclude that the circles that produced the apocalypses probably cultivated or at least were familiar with secret traditions of knowledge. This implies a societal corollary, for the dynamic of choice of a candidate or a student for initiation into the secret tradition and that candidate's or student's usually systematic and staged learning process requires a social structure.

There are cases, and 4 *Ezra* is one, in which the content of an apocalypse points to its function and purpose. 4 *Ezra* sought the resolution of the aporia that followed the destruction of the Temple. Later *Ezra* apocalypses, such as *Apocalypses of Sedrach* and *Esdras* directed the seer's questioning to the fate of the righteous and wicked after death. Because the apocalypses are pseudo-esoteric, we infer the function in such instances from the exoteric discourse of their text.

social context and the ecstatic experience. Concerning vision experiences in general, the classic work by I. M. Lewis is still pertinent: I. M. Lewis (1971), *Ecstatic Religion* (New York: Penguin Books). Note also the prophetic experience in A.R.C. Leaney (1966), *The Rule of Qumran and its Meaning: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (The New Testament Library; London: SCM Press), 64–65.

80. See Chapter 4, §4.3, on tripartite social structure.

81. Stone (1984), 431–432.

However, because some apocalypses also refer to esoteric traditions, we should ask what social functions these esoteric traditions played. Judging from the *Lists of Revealed Things* and from hints in various ascent apocalypses, apparently the secret knowledge was of cosmology (including the sphere of the divinity) and eschatology. In particular, the desire for revelation of all sorts of heavenly secrets seems to be central. Whether this revelation was seen as salvific or in some way guaranteeing celestial life or conforming to the will of the Diety or the cosmic powers is unknown. We cannot penetrate beyond these rather trite statements because the teaching itself is not available, nor is any historical information as to the social organization of the bearers of this esoteric tradition.

In light of the preceding discussion, it is my view that we must take seriously the possibility that the apocalypses, as well as certain of the wisdom books, hint at the existence of inner, secret traditions of various sorts. Such esoteric traditions are included within revealed wisdom but are not coextensive with the overt contents of the apocalypses, though they overlap with them. The indications of this may be recapitulated as follows.

1. First, the various lists of revealed things in different apocalypses include realms of celestial and terrestrial knowledge that are not reflected in the overt descriptions of apocalyptic visions.
2. Second, *1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch*, and *4 Ezra* all say that certain visions encompass aural and visual experiences that are beyond ordinary human powers of sight and hearing, but to which the pseudonymous seers have access after some form of bodily transformation or angelification. This is perhaps also the background of the citation from an Elijah apocryphon in *1 Corinthians* 2:9–10.⁸²

82. Stone and Strugnell (1979), 42–73. The eschatological transformation of the righteous who gain “angelic splendor,” the revelation of heavenly secrets, and other types of knowledge is mentioned in *2 Apocalypse of Baruch* 51:5–16. This hints at a broader notion, lying beyond the realm of our discussion here, that the sorts

3. Third, 4 *Ezra* provides evidence of a tradition of exegesis of Song of Songs unknown elsewhere and functionally parallel to the earliest Jewish mystical materials.
4. Finally, it seems that those apocalypses that circulated freely in antiquity were in fact not esoteric or secret, though they claimed that they were.⁸³

Thus the explicit teaching of the apocalypses may be called pseudo-esoteric. It seems obvious that this pseudo-esoteric strategy can best function as a literary device in a society in which secret traditions or societies are a familiar, or at least a known, phenomenon.⁸⁴ This enhances its verisimilitude.⁸⁵

of qualities and knowledge that the righteous primordial patriarchs such as Adam and Enoch were thought to have are attributed to the righteous at the eschaton. This requires a separate investigation and presentation. On Adam's qualities, see *Apocalypse of Adam* 1:2–3. Orlov discusses Enoch's learning of secrets "on various levels and through various means of mystical perception: seeing (a vision), hearing (oral instructions of an *angelus interpres*) and reading (the heavenly tablets)." See Andrei Orlov (2006), "The Learned Savant who guards the Secrets of the Great Gods: Evolution of the Roles and Titles of the Seventh Antediluvian Hero in Mesopotamian and Enochic Traditions (Part II: Enochic Traditions)," *Scrinium*, 2: 165–213, quotation from p. 175.

83. See the discussion at the end of Chapter 2 and the section in this chapter on *Hāburôt*.

84. This conclusion is foreshadowed by Thomas's statement that: "apocalyptic texts are often deemed by scholars to convey 'esoteric' matters, even though these may not be intended to be kept secret—on the contrary they are often meant to be publicized and shared beyond the 'conventicles' in which they arise": Thomas (2009), 50. Of course, Thomas attributes a different meaning to "esoteric" than I do. See Chapter 2, §2.1.

85. Antti Marjanen notes that apocalyptic predictions were "disclosed to a special group of the righteous at the end of the age" and that in the context of the apocalypses, such predictions become secretive. See Antti Marjanen (2012), "Sethian Books of the Nag Hammadi Library as Secret Books," in Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner (eds.), *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 76; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill), 87–106, quote from p. 88. This passage exhibits another form of the confounding of secret and pseudo-secret writing. April D. DeConick (2012) argues that many Gnostic movements had initiation ceremonies typified by katabatic and astrological roads traveled (pp. 4–6).

CHAPTER 7

THE SOCIAL SETTING OF ESOTERIC TRADITION

My main conclusions in the preceding chapters relevant to social setting are the following: Secret societies or groups cultivated traditions of learning and practice that they regarded as esoteric and they forbade their free circulation. This ban seems to have been generally observed in Late Antiquity. Literary texts mention the existence of secret Essene teachings. This is confirmed by archaeological finds of the Qumran library, which contained, among others, writings that may be considered to be such secret sectarian books. These writings are characterized as sectarian and their distinctive terminology does not occur in other contemporary or later Jewish or Christian sources.¹ The secret transmission of teachings and practice leads to the question of the way of life and organization of the groups responsible for it.

7.1 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Some years ago, with respect to apocalyptic literature, I concluded that “it is not possible to show that the books functioned as vessels of esoteric teaching within clearly organized socio-religious groups in the Second Temple period.”² The identification of secret traditions within the apocalypses does not invalidate this statement, but makes the effort to understand the apocalypses and their pseudo-esotericism more complex,³

1. See Chapter 4, §4.3, notes 63 and 64.

2. Michael E. Stone (1984).

3. See the end of Chapter 4, §4.3, and note 71.

because certain of them preserve, in addition to their exoteric, explicit contents, hints at other esoteric teachings. The character of social organization developed to guarantee the transmission of such esoteric teachings and their secrecy remains unknown.

Another indication of the existence of secret groups or societies in pre-Destruction Jewry might be drawn from the tripartite social structure implied in a number of sources describing revelatory experiences, particularly sources that speak of the transmission of secret teachings originating from a charismatic leader. Such a social grouping is described very strikingly in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 8, which relates a story about Isaiah and his disciples. The *Ascension* is a pseudepigraphic Christian work that has long been claimed to draw the Isaiah legend it tells from Jewish sources.⁴

When the *Ascension of Isaiah* 8 describes Isaiah's falling into a trance state, the text says that he appeared like a dead man. Then it continues:

12. But his breath was in him; for he was seeing a vision.
13. And the angel who was sent to make him see was not of this firmament, nor was he of the angels of glory of this world, but he had come from the seventh heaven.
14. And the people who stood near did (not) think, but the circle of the prophets (did), that the holy Isaiah had been taken up. . . .
16. And after Isaiah had seen this vision, he narrated it to Hezekiah, and to Josab his son and to the other prophets who had come.
17. But the leaders and the eunuchs and the people did not hear, but only Samna the scribe, and Ioaqem, and Asaph the

4. Jonathan Knight (1995), 25–26, holds for a single author. Note the limitation on copying revealed words in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 11:39. See the text in Paolo Bettolo et al. (eds.) (1995), *Ascensio Isaiae: Textus* (CCSA, 7; Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols). David Flusser (1953), "The Apocryphal Book of *Ascensio Isaiae* and the Dead Sea Sect," *IEJ* 3: 30–47, argued that the description of Isaiah's sojourn in the wilderness was drawn from the way of life of the Qumran community. See Chapter 6, §6.2, note 69.

recorder; for these also were doers of righteousness, and the sweet smell of the Spirit was upon them. But the people had not heard; for Micaiah and Josab his son had caused them to go forth, when the wisdom of this world had been taken from him and he became as one dead.

In this passage a threefold social division is clear: the seer, the inner circle or “doers of righteousness,” and the people. When Isaiah related the vision the people were actively excluded, they were “caused to go forth.”

Another example of this social structure is in 4 *Ezra* 14:45–46. The seer communicates his secret revelation of the seventy books to “the wise among the people,” whereas the exoteric revelation, the twenty-four books, is for the whole people, both “the worthy and the unworthy” (4 *Ezra* 14:45).⁵ Thus we have the same social pattern of the seer, the wise among the people, and the people themselves. The same structure recurs partly in 2 *ApBar* 5:5–7. Preceding that passage, Baruch addresses the people, after which he goes away with five chosen men, and, speaking in the first person, he says that he “narrated to them all that had been said to me.”⁶ Here too a threefold social structure is implied. In such pseudepigraphic literary works, a narrative like this served to guarantee the importance and originality of the revelations.⁷

5. See the remarks of F. García Martínez (2007), 160–161.

6. Baruch’s five companions can be compared with the five men that Ezra took with him to write down the books revealed to him: See 4 *Ezra* 14:24, 37, and 42. See more generally 2 *Apocalypse of Baruch*, J. Edward Wright (1997), “The Social Setting of the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch,” *JSP* 16: 81–96.

7. Note also Daniel 10:6, where Daniel experiences his vision among other people. In 1 *Enoch* 83 Enoch receives his dream vision in his grandfather’s house. A more complex dream vision experience is referred to in 1 *Enoch* 86:1, “and again, I saw with my eyes as I was sleeping.” After the conclusion of this second dream, Enoch is said also to remember his first dream (90:39–42). These odd descriptions are perhaps examples of what Flannery-Dailey calls, “objective phenomena seen by the dreamer in a receptive state, which is described in terms of an unusual, wakeful sleep,” in Frances Flannery-Dailey (2004), 37. In them, the authenticating function is evoked.

Flannery-Dailey remarks that “[e]ven the fictive production of esoteric books has iconic or ‘monument making’ value that would have validated the interests of an elite minority that claimed to possess an authoritative esoteric tradition.”⁸

Presumably, although the situation is complex, a tripartite structure may also be discerned in the Qumran community, where the three classes were the *maskil*,⁹ the full members of the community, and those in the process of becoming members. It was previously remarked that some sources apparently insert a fourth class between the *maskil* and the ordinary, initiated members.¹⁰ David J. Larsen argues for three stages of ascent revelation and/or teaching in the *Hodayot* (1QH) and 4Q381. Three of his four stages of revelation (his a, b, and d) correspond to a tripartite social division¹¹ as do Thomas’s three levels of secrecy.¹²

A similar social structure is observed in Manichaeism, though among the Manicheans the element of secrecy was not present. In this instance there is the founder and then two classes of members, one limited group called the “perfect ones” or the “elect,” whose role is to teach the third class, the adherents who were named *auditores* or “listeners.” In instances such as Qumran, Manichaeism, and perhaps

8. Frances Flannery-Dailey (2012), 70. If this assertion is taken to an extreme, it trumps all other arguments about pseudepigraphy, especially the experiential one because, barring the good fortune of explicit and unambiguous statements in the works themselves or in historical descriptions of the activity of apocalyptic seers (which unfortunately we do not possess), the drawing of distinctions becomes almost impossible. As an ancillary observation, however, it is thought provoking.

9. Charlotte Hempel (2013), 38, considers the role and function of the *maskil*, who had “access to esoteric knowledge,” as does Alexander (2006). The *maskil* has been discussed previously; see for example, §4.3, notes 82 and 90, and §5.2, note 4.

10. In Chapter 5, we discussed the possibility of there being a fourth class mentioned in the *Community Rule*: See §5.2.

11. See David J. Larsen (2014), 35–36, relating to revelation and teaching of mysteries. In an earlier article (David J. Larsen [2013], “Angels Among Us: The Use of Old Testament Passages as Inspiration for Temple Themes in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity*, 5: 91–110) he makes much the same point.

12. See Chapter 5, §5.2.

Early Christianity,¹³ existing in contrast as they did with a nonbelieving society and in its context, those who were completely outside the group or its Church constituted a fourth group.¹⁴ The Manichean case makes the point clearly, namely that I do not claim that this social structure is unique to secret groups, only that it is very common among them.

In particular, it seems that some such a tripartite structure was often a feature of groups with a charismatic founder whose immediate disciples were heirs of his (usually) secret teaching of knowledge and practice, most of which was withheld from nonprivileged adherents.¹⁵ That this occurs in the context of revelation, often through a charismatic, and that knowledge of it was transmitted in an inner circle show that a tripartite social structure developed, with access to special knowledge being the organizing principle.¹⁶ This structure underlies the narrative

13. Guy G. Stroumsa (2005), 27–45 and 147–168, explores esoteric knowledge in early Christianity and its loss of “its contents.” On this topic, see also Dylan M. Burns (2014), 24. I am conscious that, as relates to Qumran, the various documents and the different recensions of them as well as the hierarchy among the admitted members, produce a complex picture. Yet, the pattern exists, even if there is variation as to the exact hierarchy of the full members. April DeConick remarks, à propos the Peiratic Gnostics: “Likewise, Clement of Alexandria says that the Christian mysteries are delivered through speech and, even though he is committing much of his knowledge to writing in his book, he purposely omits the ‘unspeakable (τὰ πόρρητα)’ forbidden mysteries, fearing that they might fall into the wrong hands.” See DeConick (2012), quote from p. 12. See also the analytic remarks of Georg Simmel (1906), 472, on the impact of the Christianization of the Roman Empire on the structure of earlier Christian communities.

14. Compare Albert Baumgarten’s description of the Essene creation of a new class of “aliens,” being non-Essene Jews, in Albert I. Baumgarten (2007), 7–10.

15. See Jan N. Bremmer (1995), “Religious Secrets and Secrecy in Classical Greece,” in Hans G. Kippenberg and G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean & Near Eastern Religions* (SHR, 65; Leiden, The Netherlands, New York, & Cologne: Brill), 61–78. On p. 68 he describes the tripartite structure of the early Pythagoreans, referring back to Simmel (1906), 488–489. Note the tripartite structure of visionary, disciples, and others described in the context of Merkabah literature by Philip Alexander (2006), 124–125. See also p. 52, note 4.

16. Despite its structural similarity, the idea of secret knowledge is absent from Manichaeism. Moreover, in Manichaeism the hierarchy was more complex, and the second, inner group was in fact itself divided into three groups, of 12, 72, and 360.

instances, such as those in 4 *Ezra* and 2 *Baruch* and is instantiated in various groups of which I have spoken.

7.2 TEACHINGS KNOWN TO HAVE EXISTED THAT MAY HAVE BEEN SECRET

In Chapter 4, §4.3, I discussed textual evidence, drawn most prominently from Josephus and from Tannaitic sources, that witnesses to the existence of certain secret societies or groups in Ancient Jewish society in addition to the Therapeutae and the Essenes, the latter including the Qumran sect. Now, I wish to add some further information that, although not being as specific, I nonetheless regard as relevant to this subject:

1. *Mysteries, Knowledge, and Secrets*: The Persian word *raz*, “secret, mystery,” which was borrowed into Aramaic, appears in Daniel 2:18, 19, 27, 30, 47, and 4:6, as well as in the Dead Sea Scrolls. We have discussed it in Chapter 2 in some detail.¹⁷ It has been thought to indicate a body of special knowledge related to the structure of the world or similar subjects. Analogously, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, *da’at* [knowledge] often seems to have as a specific referent some sort of special divinely granted knowledge.¹⁸

17. See Chapter 2, §2.1. See Gladd (2008), Goff (2003a), and Thomas (2009). See further on Qumran usage in Samuel Thomas (2010), “Esoteric Knowledge in the Qumran Aramaic Texts,” in Katell Berthelot and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (eds.), *Aramaica Qumranica: Proceedings of the Conference on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran in Aix-en-Provence, 30 June-2 July 2008* (STDJ, 94; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 403–428.

18. See, for example, its use in the phrase דעת דני [secrets of knowledge] in 1QS 4:6; compare Thomas (2009), 161–168. As examples of the use of דעת, see 1QS 4:22 “knowledge (*da’at*) of the Most High,” parallel to “wisdom of the sons of heaven,” 1QH^a 10:13 “a mediator of knowledge (*da’at*) of the mysteries of wonder,” 4Q204 7:11–12, and many other places, such as 1QpHab 11:1–2. Heavenly, priestly *da’at* is also known: See 4Q400 fragment 1, col. I, lines 17–19, 4Q403 fragment 1 col. I 23–26. Carol A. Newsom (2012), 211–212, deals with the meaning of the root *y.d.’* in the *Thanksgiving Hymns* (1QH^a) from Qumran, remarking

In more general terms, Thomas points to particular features of the Dead Sea Scrolls that refer to secret knowledge. The care with which this knowledge must be guarded contrasts starkly with the watchers' revelation of illicit mysteries.¹⁹ In 4Q^{SerekŠ}Širot [*Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*] angels use the word *da'at* in connection with the heavenly world, for example, 4Q403, fragment 1, line 18, "he will bless all the *e[lim]* who *draw near* to his faithful knowledge [*da'at*]." ²⁰ The dossier on *da'at* in the Qumran texts is much larger than just given, but lies beyond the proper limits of this investigation. We can remark, however, that whatever else it may mean, *da'at* does sometimes denote special knowledge, celestial or mundane. Additionally, as was discussed in Chapter 2, Samuel Thomas speaks of "mysteries" at Qumran and the role of knowledge thereof.²¹

Shani Tzoref has traced the use of the terminology occurring in Deuteronomy 29:28, "The secret things [נסתרות] belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things [גלות] belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law."²² She shows that issues connected with the term "secrets, secret things" [*nistarot*] are very complex. Deuteronomy 29:28 gives a biblical basis to the use of the root *s.t.r* for "hidden, secret," which word has been fallaciously connected

that the capacity for knowing is not just what the speaker is thankful for (it is that), but also a gift from God. See further *ibid*, 212.

19. Thomas (2009), 163. See Stone (2015a), "Enoch and the Fall of the Angels: Teaching and Status," *DSD* 22(3): 342–357.

20. Carol A. Newsom (1985), *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (HSS 27; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press), 188, 194, and see her discussion of the use of the root *y.d.'* on p. 201. Philip Alexander (2006), 68–69, points to the knowledge as it is employed in 4Q301 (4QMysteries) and one might further compare 1QpHab 11:1–2 where it is used in a clearly eschatological sense.

21. Thomas (2009), 3–17. See also Gladd (2008), 8–16.

22. Shani Tzoref (2010). As far as the meanings denoted by the terms, on pp. 302–303 she says, "the uses of the terms *niglot* and *nistarot* correspond to the genre of the composition in which they appear." In the *Orphica* line 41 revelations in the form of a double law are mentioned. This brings to mind 4 *Ezra* 14:6 and 26.

etymologically to the Greek *mysterion*,²³ and clearly this verse can be exegeted to underpin an epistemology distinguishing earthly and celestial knowledge.

On p.73 of his book Thomas (2009) suggests that sapiential concerns fused “with ideas imported from Babylonian, Persian, and Greek traditions” that involved “correspondences between heavenly and earthly realities.” This led to a fundamental shift in epistemology, in which divine revelation is viewed as a “—perhaps as the—cornerstone of legitimate wisdom.” This he applies to the Qumran *Yahad* for whom “the acquisition and safeguarding of knowledge was perhaps the most salient rationale and guiding principle for the life of the community.”²⁴ The safeguarding of knowledge is, of course, at the heart of the functioning of the Qumran community as a secret society.

Both Thomas and Tzoref claim to recognize a distinctive terminology that, in many cases at least, the *Yahad* used to denote special or revealed knowledge that was not diffused beyond the boundaries of the sect.²⁵ This includes a reapplication of wisdom terminology, accompanied by sensitivity to its cosmic dimensions, a move that nurtured attitudes of secrecy and superiority among those who had access to the (true) wisdom, the special knowledge.²⁶ The sense of superiority that the possession of secret knowledge bestowed was pointed

23. See Tzoref (2010), 313. This etymology was already proposed by Isaac Casaubon in 1614: See the discussion in Jonathan Z. Smith (1990), *Drudgery Divine. On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion, 14; Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 55–56. Smith presents a very cogent analysis of the use of *mysterion* and *rāz*’, and the approach to these terms in modern scholarship (72–79).

24. See Thomas (2009), 74–75; Tzoref (2010).

25. See the remarks in note 18 in this section about *raz* and *da’at* and also Tzoref’s (2010) observations about the root *str*. This bibliography could be extended considerably.

26. The bibliography on these topics is extremely rich and is not presented here. I trust that my chief point is clear. Earlier wisdom terminology came to highlight these new, revealed, and secret contents. The question can be raised whether this terminology was actually nonfreighted in its older occurrences, a question raised by consideration of *Ben Sira* 3:21–23, discussed in Chapter 6, §6.1.

out by Simmel and reinforced by Hazelrigg.²⁷ The specially revealed character of this Qumran and allied wisdom doubtless led to secrecy in the teaching and diffusion of both it and the literature in which it played a role. Almost inevitably, such attitudes reflect transmission in secret social groups, if they were not the cause of the creation of such groupings.

2. *Teaching the Esoteric.* *M. Haggigah* 2.1 lists subjects the teaching of which is limited, in the case of the Merkabah [the Divine Chariot] to one person and, in the case of cosmogony, to two. The continuation of the same Mishnah says, "Anyone who looks into four things would be better off if he had not come into this world: what is above, what is below, what is before, and what is after." We do not aspire here to deal with all that is called esoteric in rabbinic Judaism, but not only is the existence of this tradition most intriguing for our study, but the reminiscence of *Ben Sira* 3:21–23 is also telling. It is clear therefore that some Rabbinic circles did cultivate esoteric teaching.²⁸

27. See Chapter 1, note 2.

28. The Merkabah and Hekhalot mysticism, and particularly its dating and its role in Tannaitic times, has been much debated. See very recently the new edition of Gruenwald's significant work: Ithamar Gruenwald (2014). The classic treatment of the subject, to which many have reacted, is Gershom G. Scholem (1960). For early calls for reassessment, see Peter Schäfer (1986), and further Schäfer (1992), *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press) and Peter Schäfer (1984), "The New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and in Merkavah Mysticism," *JJS* 35(1): 19–35. An excellent overview by Philip Alexander is included in the introductory remarks to 3 *Enoch* in James H. Charlesworth *OTP*, 1.229–239. He deals sensitively with the similarities of apocalyptic literature to the somewhat later mystical *merkabah* and *ma'aseh b'rešit* speculation, noting that *merkabah* elements are to be found in some apocalypses, and that some eschatological elements are to be found in *merkabah* texts. He does not discuss the social groups by whom these traditions may have been cultivated. Annette Yoshiko Reed (2007), 479–481, sees the prohibitions relating to "what is above, etc." as marking the limits, in rabbinic understanding, between secret and exoteric knowledge. She discusses the limits of *merkabah* and *ma'aseh b'rešit* speculations both in public and in delimited contexts.

3. *The Forbidden Teaching of the Watchers and Its Transmission*: We have talked of the transmission of secret knowledge in the apocalypses. Other dimensions of the apocalypses and certain other Second Temple period works stress the forbidden teachings transmitted by the Watchers to humans. The prime source dealing with this revelation of forbidden secret knowledge is, of course, in the *Book of the Watchers*, that is, in *1 Enoch* 7 and 8:1–3.²⁹ The reconstructed literary prehistory of this pericope is complex³⁰ but from our point of view, what is central is that the fallen angels teach forbidden knowledge.³¹ The fallen angels revealed this knowledge, which comprehends both “culture hero teachings” of certain skills comparable with those the Greeks considered to have been taught by Prometheus³² and also various divinatory and magical techniques. In *1 Enoch* 16:3 the fallen watchers are accused: “You

29. This material recurs in a somewhat different form and with some additional traditions in the *Similitudes* in *1 Enoch* 69. This teaching is discussed in detail in Stone (2015a) and by many others.

30. The relationship between the Shemihazah and the Asa’el material has been on the table since the work of G. Beer included in Emil Kautzsch (ed.) (1900), *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr), 2.224–225.

31. See also *1 Enoch* 7:1, 8:1–2. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* 14:2–4 clearly alludes to these traditions. See Annette Yoshiko Reed (2015), who discusses different valuations of the knowledge revealed by the watchers. Observe that Wisdom 7:20 counts “the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots” among the special knowledge quite legitimately revealed to Solomon, whereas in *1 Enoch* 7:1 they are taught illegitimately by the Watchers.

32. Particularly Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound*, note lines 480–505. Nickelsburg reviewed this issue in George W. E. Nickelsburg (2001), *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress), 192–193. In a work that remained incomplete, Amos Funkenstein also discoursed very interestingly on Prometheus: (2003), “The Disenchantment of Knowledge: The Emergence of the Ideal of Open Knowledge in Ancient Israel and Classical Greece,” *Aleph* 3: 15–95, especially p. 36. Thomas (2009), 175, writes of mysteries and evil mysteries: Also compare the Watchers as culture heroes in *Sibylline Oracles* 1.89–99. See discussion of transmission of the mysteries revealed by the fallen angels, §7.3. Annette Yoshiko Reed (2014), 118–119, and in her notes, analyzes the nature of the knowledge revealed and its gendering, sensitively also observing in her note 37 the intertwining of watchers and Prometheus traditions in *Sibylline Oracles* 1:88–103.

were in heaven, and no mystery was revealed to you; but a stolen mystery you learned.” The watchers’ teaching is not part of their heavenly state, but they stole it from heaven.³³ In other words, there is a double accusation: The watchers both stole knowledge and transmitted these forbidden stolen mysteries (8:3) to their human wives and hybrid children. Any further transmission is not discussed, despite the fact that the forbidden teaching includes certain subjects, such as the cutting of roots, which must have formed part of the learning of some esoteric circles.³⁴

The idea of mysteries is taken up again in *1 Enoch* 9:6–8. Asa’el is said to reveal the eternal mysteries that are in heaven, and Shemiḥazah and his cohorts are said to have taught “all sins and . . . hate-inducing charms.” Again, nothing is said about transmission of this knowledge from one human to another. In contrast, God’s omniscience includes “all things manifest and uncovered” (9:5). In 10:7 humans are said to be in danger of perishing “because of the mystery that the Watchers told and taught their sons.”³⁵ In Chapter 12 a new theme comes to the fore, that of Enoch’s intercession for and reprimand of the fallen angels. In this context, *1 Enoch* 14:3 states that God “created and destined humans to understand the words of knowledge.”³⁶ Yet this is surely not the forbidden knowledge taught by the Watchers.

Strikingly, the issue of further transmission of the teaching of the Watchers is rarely raised.³⁷ In *1 Enoch* 33:1 Uriel is said to have written

33. On this verse, see the remarks of Reed (2014), 128, who speaks of “true knowledge wrongly revealed.”

34. See Reed (2014), 119, who argues for the ambiguity of lore associated both with men and with women. She speaks justly of “a more poignant and ambivalent account of the power and danger of civilization, as perhaps emblemized by the plant lore of women no less than the metallurgy of men.”

35. All citations from *1 Enoch* are drawn from George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam (2012), *1 Enoch: The Hermeneia Translation*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress).

36. Compare also *1 Enoch* 93:1–2.

37. Also in the form of this incident in *Jubilees*, its further transmission is not specified.

down calendarical and astronomical knowledge, surely a testimony to the Enoch tradition. But not one word is said there of the teaching of the Watchers,³⁸ which does feature, however, in a tradition in *Jubilees*. There it is related that Arpachshad's son, Kenan, having learned reading and writing,

8:3 found a writing which the ancestors had engraved on stone. And he read what was in it. And he transcribed it. And he sinned because of what was in it since there was in it the teaching of the Watchers by which they used to observe the omens of the sun and moon and stars within all the signs of heaven.

8:4 And he copied it down, but he did not tell about it because he feared to tell Noah about it lest he be angry with him because of it (*Jubilees* 8:3–4).³⁹

Another tradition in *Jubilees* 12:25–27 relates that God taught Abraham Hebrew, which had been lost at the time of the Fall, “and I (i.e., God) began to speak with him in Hebrew in the tongue of the creation. And he took the books of his fathers, and these were written in Hebrew, and he transcribed them, and he began from henceforth to study them, and I made known to him that which he could not (understand).” In this tradition of the transmission of primordial knowledge, the additional factor of the restoration of the Hebrew language is introduced. Striking is the statement that Abraham transcribed the books that he had learned to understand by divine intervention.⁴⁰

38. Moreover, there is no coda to this work explaining its own transmission. Pseudo-Eupolemus describes Abraham as a culture hero, teaching the Phoenicians and the Egyptians: Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.17.3–9 and Charlesworth *OTP*, 2.880–881.

39. On the overlap of some of these subjects with those discovered by Enoch, see Michael E. Stone (2015a). See note 31 in this section. Jonathan Ben-Dov suggested in a lecture at a symposium in Zikhron Ya'akov in 2013 that the images of Mesopotamian kings together with cuneiform inscriptions that are found in Lebanon provided the inspiration for the Kenan tradition in *Jubilees*.

40. In *Jubilees* 32:20 is another heavenly revelation also accompanied by a commandment to copy it. Jacob, having received the contents of seven heavenly tablets,

Abraham could study those books because he had learned Hebrew and was able to know everything “which he was unable to understand,” that is, apparently, before learning Hebrew (*Jubilees* 12:27). By way of a concluding remark, it is intriguing to observe that this notion resembles the idea of the inability of mortals to understand the full meaning of heavenly revelations. This is noted already from the second verse of the *Book of the Watchers* (1 *Enoch* 1:2) where Enoch asserts, “I understood what I saw.” He did, but other mortals couldn’t.

7.3 THE NARRATIVE FRAMEWORKS AND SECRET TRANSMISSION

I previously mentioned that one, perhaps the foremost, function of framework stories in the apocalypses is as authentication machinery.⁴¹ Even if we determine that the apocalypses are predominantly pseudo-esoteric, nonetheless, it is interesting to investigate how these framework stories describe transmissions of the heavenly secrets that are revealed to the ancient seers. This may provide some insight at least into how secret transmission was conceptualized or visualized, perhaps based on contemporary social usage. Many, sometimes most, of the heavenly secrets are disclosed in detail as part of the narrative of

says, in vv. 25–26: “‘O Lord, how will I remember everything that I read and saw?’ and he said to him, ‘I will cause you to remember every thing.’” 26 And he went up from him and he woke up from his sleep and he recalled every thing that he had read and seen and he wrote down all of the matters which he had read and seen.” This theme continues in *Jubilees* 30:20, where the books are transmitted to Levi. In *Jubilees* 47:9 Moses is taught writing by Amram: Compare the similar idea in *ALD* 13:4. Strikingly, *Jos As* 22:13 speaks of Levi’s ability to read heavenly letters and his transmitting them to Asenath in secret: cf. 23:8. Clearly, this theme would repay further research. On the analogous idea of the eschatological restoration of Hebrew, see Michael E. Stone and Esther Eshel (1993), “The Eschatological Holy Tongue in Light of a Fragment from Qumran,” *Tarbiz*, 62.2: 169–177 (in Hebrew).

41. Chapter 6, §6.1, notes 38 and 41 and §6.2.

the seer's visionary experience. However, some are not and are merely alluded to. As a result, they function like the references to unrevealed, secret knowledge in the lists of revealed things.⁴²

Using a different story leading to the same end, the *Testament of Moses* 1:16–17 describes how the actual scroll of Moses's teaching was stored and preserved. It was placed in a jar, treated with antifungal and insect-repellent cedar oil,⁴³ and was sealed until uncovered in later generations. The finding of the jar is not related, but is implied by the very existence of the *Testament of Moses*. Considering that scrolls from both Qumran Cave 1 and Cave 11 were stored in jars wrapped in cloth, we may conclude that this narrative reflects contemporary practice.⁴⁴ Having thus explained and guaranteed its own authenticity, the *Testament of Moses* tellingly does not record any visions, angelophanies, or dreams, for they are not needed.

The attitude to the revelation of heavenly secrets in the *Similitudes of Enoch* forms a notable contrast with the forbidden teachings of the Watchers in the *Book of the Watchers*. The *Book of the Similitudes of Enoch* is addressed to “those who come after,” and Enoch says he will not

42. Jonas C. Greenfield, Michael E. Stone, and Esther Eshel (2004), *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Translation, Commentary* (SVTP, 19; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 146. One such undisclosed vision might be referred to in *Aramaic Levi Document* 4:13, where Levi says, “And I hid this [i.e., vision he has just received] too in my heart and I revealed it to nobody.” Thus, in addition to Levi's vision that the text relates, there was another vision hidden in his heart, referred to but not discussed in the surviving fragments. However, this was probably the vision of Levi's installation, and this instance is therefore likely not relevant. The *Orphica*, line 45, also admonishes, “guard the divine message in your heart:” see Charlesworth OTP, 2.797.

43. Concerning cedar oil's properties and uses, see Michael E. Stone (2015b), “The Cedar in Jewish Antiquity,” in Markham J. Geller (ed.), *The Archaeology and Material Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (IJS Studies in Judaica, 16; Leiden, The Netherlands, & Boston: Brill), 66–82. Compare *Test Adam* 3:6, where a book is preserved in the cave opposite Paradise.

44. Dr. Ira Rabin, who examined them, informs me that neither the textiles nor the scrolls had any sign of cedar oil residue, but it is quite volatile. It is not possible to determine whether the intent of the *Testament of Moses* was that the scroll was of parchment or of papyrus. The material is not specified, and, of course, it is a fictional narrative.

withhold “the beginning of wisdom” from them. He stresses the special wisdom he has been granted and that he spoke to those who dwell on the earth (*1 Enoch* 37:4–5).⁴⁵

4. Until now there had not been given from the presence of Lord of Spirits
such wisdom as I have received according to my insight,
according to the good pleasure of the Lord of Spirits,
by whom the lot of everlasting life was given to me.
5. Three parables were (imparted) to me,
and I took (them) up and spoke to those who dwell on the earth.
[Emphasis added.]

Moreover, in the *Similitudes* on a number of occasions, angels reveal hidden things to Enoch.⁴⁶

In the *Similitudes* (*1 Enoch* 37:5) Enoch is said to reveal to humans the heavenly knowledge he has gained. This does not fit readily with the idea of a special group to whom alone Enoch will reveal secrets. In the subsequent chapters, “secrets” designate the mechanics of astronomy and meteorology, as in *1 Enoch* 41:3—there that which is hidden is the same heavenly mechanics. Indeed, the accompanying angel is often given the title of “the one who showed me hidden things,” for example, *1 Enoch* 40:2, 44:3, and 46:2.⁴⁷ In *1 Enoch* 38:3 the hidden things seem to be eschatological and will be revealed to the righteous at the end;⁴⁸ and in *1 Enoch* 40:2 the expression refers explicitly to the

45. In *3 Enoch* 8:2 Enoch is given wisdom, understanding, etc., by God (Charlesworth, *OTP* 1.263).

46. See also *1 Enoch* 38:3, 51:3. Revelations of secrets are mentioned in 51:3, 64:2, 65:11, etc.

47. Intriguingly, it has been noted that much Mesopotamian science, including astronomy, was regarded as secret. See Chapter 3, §3.1, note 14.

48. I agree with Nickelsburg and VanderKam (2012), 102, that the hidden things in *1 Enoch* 38:3 are eschatological. It is intriguing and perhaps significant that in the eschatological testament in *Jubilees* 23 there is no language about knowledge and wisdom.

names of the four archangels. The angel “showed me all the hidden things made their names known to me.”⁴⁹ According to Chapter 51, “in those days” the Chosen One will sit on the throne of the Lord of Spirits and “all the secrets of wisdom will go forth from the counsel of his mouth” (1 *Enoch* 51:3).⁵⁰ This granting of wisdom to and by the enthroned Chosen One recalls 1 *Enoch* 41:1.⁵¹ The transmission of the secrets by Enoch to succeeding generations is not dealt with, though it is hinted at when Enoch records certain revealed things.

In the Enochic *Book of Luminaries*, which is several centuries older than 4 *Ezra*, we read:

82:1 Now my son Methuselah, I am telling you all these things and am writing (them) down. I have revealed all of them to you and have given you the books about all these things. My son, keep the book written by your father so that you may give (it) to the generations of the world.⁵²

82:2 Wisdom I have given to you and to your children and to those who will be your children so that they may give this wisdom which is beyond their thought to their children for the generations.⁵³

Here, as in 4 *Ezra*, there is the command to write down things revealed and communicate them to the future, and the mode of transmission is made explicit. In 4 *Ezra* it is to the wise of the people; in 1 *Enoch* 82 it is to Methuselah’s descendants. In both cases it is to particular groups of people. The examples of this phenomenon could be multiplied.⁵⁴

49. The same meaning of “hidden” occurs in 1 *Enoch* 40:8, where Enoch says he has written down their names.

50. This phraseology is somewhat reminiscent of Isaiah 11:4.

51. See Isaiah 11:2. It is, of course, very notable that the Elect One sits on the throne of the Lord of Spirits, but this cannot be explored here.

52. Perhaps this means “eternal generations.”

53. In 4Q227, fragment 2, the speaker, an angel, talks of Enoch writing a book containing astronomical and calendary information. Does “those who will be your children” indicate other righteous people beyond Enoch’s bodily descendants? If so, perhaps the phrase means “those who will become.”

54. This is no. 12 in John Collins’s “Master Paradigm” presented in Collins (1979), especially p. 8. In addition to the statements in the apocalypses about

Attitudes to the transmission of visionary revelations are also prominent in Daniel.⁵⁵ In Daniel 12:4, however, after the seer has been told the meaning of his vision, the angel adds, “But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end”; see 12:9.⁵⁶ So, according to this text, the book containing the things revealed to Daniel is to be kept sealed until the end. Moreover, observe that the things revealed to Daniel are to be written in a book and sealed. Yet the book of Daniel, with this clear admonition at its conclusion, circulated early and rather widely.⁵⁷ This all is in concert with pseudo-esotericism.

their own transmission, other traditions about transmission are embedded within the apocalypses and allied works. Such, for example, is the Noah tradition in 1 *Enoch* 65:2b–68:1 (as emended). On this Noah material, see Vered Hillel (2010), “A Reconsideration of Charles’ Designated ‘Noah Interpolations’ in 1 *Enoch* 54:1–55:1; 60; 65:1–69:25,” in Michael E. Stone, Aryeh Amihay, and Vered Hillel (eds.), *Noah and His Book(s)*, (SBLEJL, 28; Atlanta, GA: SBL), 27–45. Another such tradition is that of the antediluvian stelae, also known to Josephus, *AJ* 1.70–71: See further *History of the Forefathers* 40–43 and many other sources. A third example is the Noah material, the transmission of which is described in *Jubilees* 10:2–15, whereas *Jubilees* itself is a revelation to Moses on Sinai. Concerning the general issue of discovery of supposedly hidden books, see Wolfgang Speyer (1970), *Bücherfunde in der Glaubenswerbung der Antike* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht). Observe, moreover, that the first verse of the *Enochic Book of the Luminaries* says of itself that it is “[t]he entire book about them, as it is, he (the angel) showed me,” and compare 1 *Enoch* 74:1–2.

55. See Chapter 6, §6.2, notes 69 and 70.

56. This has, rightly, been contrasted with Revelation 22:10 where the angel tells John “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.” The difference reflects the self-consciousness of the two authors who consider themselves as living at different points on the eschatological timeline. Furthermore, according to Deuteronomy 31:9, Moses was told to write the song he pronounced; Isaiah is to write words on a tablet “so that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever” (Isaiah 30:8); compare Jeremiah 30:2, 36:2, 36:28; Ezekiel is instructed to write down the plan of the ideal temple (43:11). See on the function of writing in Israelite antiquity, Najman (2003). On writing in general in the culture of the ancient Near East, see Carr (2005), and compare also van der Toorn (2007). In the biblical sources, nothing is said about transmission to the elect, despite Isaiah 30:8, which calls for writing to be a witness: contrast 4 *Ezra* 12:37–38.

57. On Daniel literature, see Lorenzo DiTommaso (2010), “Daniel, Book of” and “Daniel, Pseudo-, texts,” in John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (eds.),

1 *Enoch* 81 deals with Enoch's understanding and writing down the contents of the heavenly tablets and books.⁵⁸ After this, in verses 5 and 6, the archangels command him to write down "everything," to tell it to Methuselah, and to write it down as a testimony for all his children. In 82:1–2 Enoch passes this information both orally and in written form to Methuselah, "so that they may give this wisdom which is beyond their thought to their children for the generations."⁵⁹ The same idea of Enoch writing down heavenly books occurs in 2 *Enoch* 23, where the angelified Enoch writes down 366 books at the dictation of the angel Vreveil. In 33:5–12 [J] and 35:2–3 the transmission of the books is discussed and how they survived the Flood (33:12). A similar idea forwarded by 4 *Ezra* was discussed in detail in §6.1.⁶⁰

At the conclusion of this inquiry, may I remark that I believe that it has shown that the perspective of secret societies can be fruitful both for deepening our understanding of groups in Ancient Judaism of which we already knew and for discerning new dimensions in the complex social structure of that age. The remarkable survival of insider evidence for the Qumran Essene group strengthens the persuasiveness of the basic paradigm that Georg Simmel proposed in the early twentieth century and that was developed by Hazelrigg into his nine propositions. These perceptions can be tested against actual evidence and move beyond being ideal structures. Consequently, a path to deeper understanding, and perhaps to the recognition of hitherto unknown groups in Judaism of the Second Temple period, can now be discerned where none was formerly.

The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism (Grand Rapids, MI, & Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans), 513–517, and bibliography there. Charlotte Hempel (2013), 15, remarks that there must be a relationship of some sort between "the circles behind Daniel and the groups behind the Dead Sea Scrolls." She points out a number of similarities.

58. Compare 1 *Enoch* 103. It is noteworthy that in Daniel 10:21 the angel reveals the content of a heavenly book or writing called "the book of truth."

59. Nickelsburg and VanderKam (2012), 112.

60. See Chapter 6, §6.1.

“CIRCLES BEHIND . . .” AND FINAL THOUGHTS

Repeatedly, scholars, in their analysis of documents of the Second Temple period, refer to “circles behind such-and-such” ideas or documents, be they “sapiential,” or “sacerdotal,” or “scribal,” just to name categories currently in fashion.¹ The present remarks are far from a sweeping denial of the legitimacy of such claims. However, groups constructed by scholars from ideas present in texts must be envisioned as existing, at any given period, alongside groups whose names are known from the surviving ancient sources. It would be instructive to list all the “groups” and “circles” that have been posited by scholars and combine them with those that can be identified by historical and sociological considerations and attempt to fit these diverse parts of the social jigsaw puzzle together.

At any given point in the Second Temple period, we may assume that a substantial number of groups existed contemporaneously. These included some, or even most, of those mentioned in historical sources. Those sources provide evidence for the Essenes and the Therapeutae, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Hasideans, and the Zealots, not to speak of the Gospels’ “Herodians” and “high priests,” the Samaritans and Samaritan sects, as well as groups remembered by the rabbis, such

1. Carol A. Newsom (2004) uses a brilliant analysis of discourse to argue for the existence of shared points of view of certain writings. On p. 56 she is indecisive (and rightly so) about the existence of groups “in the sociological sense” but speaks of there being “a certain common ethos” in certain collocations of compositions. See for example pp. 51–55. I would stress the value of Newsom’s approach. How its results can be integrated with the outcome of the type of analysis I have engaged in here remains for future contemplation.

as the “Morning Bathers,” “the Former Hasideans,” the *Ḥāburôt*, and others.² An *embarras de richesse* of social divisions in Judaism of the land of Israel thus becomes evident. The scholarly tendency to cut society’s cloth to the measure of certain texts or interpretations results in adding to this wealth of groups attested by documents, a proliferation of inferred groups, the plausibility of whose existence within the known complex social structure of the time must be accounted for.

Moreover, secret knowledge and practice and their transmission engender social groups that guard and transmit the secret knowledge. The existence and the structure of such groups, it has been theorized, are created by the dynamic caused by highly valued secrets. We have shown that in certain cases this causal connection is actually documented in known groups. Consequently the existence of some secret groups, in addition to the Essenes and, particularly, the Qumran covenanters, becomes a factor that we must consider in the description of Jewish society of the Second Temple period. Secret groups differ from diverse groupings inferred from history of ideas or through discourse analysis or other such methods. Secret groups, by their nature, usually present specific sociological and structural features that increase the plausibility of positing their existence from the footsteps they leave.

Finally, once the existence of secret knowledge and secret groups is accepted, then their existence in turn changes the character of knowledge in the society within whose ambit a given secret tradition or secret traditions exist. That knowledge also plays a role in the very generation of such secret groups.³ As Hazelrigg acutely remarks, the implications

2. Compare also C.R.A. Morray-Jones (1992), 20 who talks of Ḥasidim of Galilee, a visionary-mystical “circle,” one of the circles from whom “the Tannaim inherited their esoteric traditions.”

3. Samuel Thomas (2010) justly remarks: “but in any case, it is the reception of the text that is often the decisive factor in esoteric circles; what matters is not so much the originary milieu of the text, but that the text contains potential for use and meaning which is compatible with the alternative reality that the sectarian group purports itself to reify. Or, perhaps, put more strongly, what matters is the control of a text and its potential effects on a given community such as the *Yahād*” (p. 409).

of the existence of hidden knowledge affect the coming into being and the structure of secret societies: "The secret society is formed out of the intentional, conscious planning efforts of individuals to construct a hierarchical organization for the complete control of a large subordinated group of people. It is unique in the extent to which it asserts power: more than any other organization, it subjects materials outside of thought to a form which thought has cast."⁴ Indeed, if his analysis is cogent, the very existence of the secret society and the way it is structured are a result of the existence of knowledge, whether conceptual or practical, that a group of people are convinced must be kept hidden. This need sets in force the growth and structure as well as the development or change of such groups. Tracing this dynamic and its ramifications, however, must await further research by historians of Ancient Judaism into the texts and the archaeological and epigraphic findings, which will cast light into the recesses of such hidden groups.

4. Lawrence E. Hazelrigg (1969), 324.

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